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Migration and cultural identity: Performing the Afro-Caribbean woman's struggle

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**MIGRATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:
PERFORMING THE AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMAN'S STRUGGLE**

**A Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

**Elvinet S. Wilson
University Of Northern Iowa
August 2002**

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**Entitled: Migration and Cultural Identity: Performing the Afro-Caribbean
Woman's Struggle**

**has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.**

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**Dr. John Somervill
Dean, Graduate College**

**For my family: John D. Wilson, Sr., Cleola Wilson,
Edris, Judy, John, Carla, and Krissy**

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I must be engaged with myself in order to be truly engaged with someone else—This is the principal path to enlightenment and to the most conceivable relationship which consists of harmony, justice, balance, and well-being.

MOLEFI KETE ASANTE

A Personal Connection

January, 1995 – New Providence Island, Bahamas: I packed my bags, said goodbye to my sisters, my brother, hopped on board a 727 and came to America. Uncertain about my future and the journey I had begun, I remember looking out the plane’s window with mixed emotions. I was leaving home – the place where I grew up, was raised. But I knew it had to be done. I knew I had to search for a better way of life. I hadn’t chosen America, she chose me.

Arriving in the freshman dormitory of a historically Black college, I made my way down the hall on the first floor, toward the room they assigned me. As I turned the bend after coming out of the main office with my key, I could see numerous Black faces walking in and out of rooms, carrying TV sets, struggling with refrigerators and boxes filled with all the “necessary” things advertisers insisted a college freshman should have. My room was not far from the main office, but it seemed to be light years that passed as I dragged my one suitcase and the sports bag I borrowed from my Mom, down the hall – realizing for the first time in my life that I was absolutely alone. Neither Mummy nor Daddy

were there to drive me to college to begin my freshman experience. It had taken 10 dollars in cab fare to get me from the airport to my new address. My sisters and brother were back home going about their daily business and although my Dad was in the U.S., he lived on the East Coast – I was in Florida.

But there I stood finally, after opening the door to room 106, at the front end of a small space looking at the bunk bed and tiny closet and cubicles in the center of the room. It all looked so bland and cold – the hard cement squares of the wall, the gray floor. But I said to myself, “okay, you’re here.” I lay my bags down in the closet, claimed the bottom bunk and proceeded through the door of my new life.

Of course, few things reminded me of home in that little town in Florida. But there seemed to be enough similarities in the culture of the South in addition to the warm climate that helped me blend in with the woodwork and function effectively in my work and social environment from 1995 to 2000.

Iowa however, was very different.

It was not until my journey to graduate school in the Midwest that I felt such feelings of anxiety and confusion – what one of my new professors said was culture shock. I had never seen snow, never experienced winter (and believe me when I tell you, the winter that came that year was very bad), and not to be funny or anything, never seen so many White people in the same place.

I drove from Florida to Iowa, non-stop. I had heard so many stories on the news, from acquaintances, friends, about racial problems in America, I was determined as I was alone, not to stop and rest at a hotel along the way. I went through Georgia, up the mountains of Tennessee, around until I hit Illinois. Filling up on gas and caffeine, I rubbed my sore eyes as I began to see miles and miles of cornfields along the highway. Not knowing what was ahead, I remember being so cautious and frightened. "What if these people are racist?" I thought to myself. "I am a Black woman, alone."

Despite my own psychological torture and sleep deprivation, I made it to school to begin what I saw as phase two of my educational journey. Besides having to deal with the cold, I withdrew from social settings and tried to keep communication with anyone who looked foreign to a minimum – and that was nearly everyone. I sound crazy, don't I? But I became depressed and wasn't eating well. I threw myself into decorating my new apartment once I was assigned one, and blasted all the reggae, calypso and rake-n-scrape I could find in my music collection. I cooked curry chicken, souse, and fire engine (corned beef and rice) whenever I could afford the ingredients. I called my Mom and sisters a great deal too, and for some reason they could never remember that I was calling from Iowa and not Idaho.

As the winter progressed, I got worse. And after experiencing my first minor blizzard – I told my Mom I couldn't take it anymore and wanted to come

home. Of course, I wasn't totally serious about leaving, but saying it, expressed what I was feeling somehow. It was the first time really, that I was forced to confront my otherness.

I wrote a paper that Fall entitled, "Cultural Identity and Psychological Adaptation: The Woman Caribbean Expatriate" for a course in Intercultural Communication. This research project grew out of that paper, along with the feelings and events I noted above and what I have learned about both intercultural and women's issues since then.

During my depression, one of my personal projects was to look for other Caribbean natives in the area. I was reaching out to find others in my situation who knew what a first winter was like and who could maybe help me survive one emotionally. Ironically, my search turned up another Bahamian woman in the area and three other Caribbean students currently enrolled at the university. These women along with a few others I found, became the heart of my investigation to uncover secrets about my own cultural identity and questions about race that confused me in my initial culture shock. I have merged our experiences and draw on them to answer the research questions I pose in this master's thesis.

Purpose

The fundamental purpose of this investigation is to gain insight into the process of cultural identity negotiation of Afro-Caribbean women in the United States. In the process of conducting this research study, it is hoped that two major questions will be answered:

1. What are the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women in the process of migration and in their encounter with America's system of racial relationships?
2. In their personal narratives, are there parallels or certain themes that are echoed and can help us understand them as a group from similar backgrounds?

Background and Historical Connection

The process of investigation for this study begins in the place of origin – home. It is in this context that a socially constructed reality provides us with the cultural knowledge and tools necessary to live ideally, a normal, healthy life as part of a nurturing community. What happens when humans move across borders to different social environments is a central question in this research. In the following narrative I attempt to construct a world to open the mind of the reader and allow the imagery of life in a different place to settle in his/her mind, in order to introduce the topic of research.

“A child is born into a large family on an island too small to be noticed on a map of the world. A stone's throw away, other dark-skinned and some light-skinned children play ring-play in a muddy schoolyard. In another area, a

young woman takes her lunch break and goes to Gully's Shack with a co-worker, both attempting to satisfy their taste for chicken-in-the-bag. They head to the beach where it is peaceful and sit on a bench, on a walkway that separates the street traffic from the blue water and sand. They eat, talk and enjoy the sun as it beats down on their brown skin just like every other day. By 3:30 in the afternoon, the jitney drivers are happy as children of all ages, sporting public and private elementary and high school uniforms, scramble to get a seat and get home after a long day of disciplined desk and chair, sit and stand, respect and learn, school routines. Saturday is the day almost everyone, except the Adventists do household chores and running around, before they rush out to spend Friday's cheque downtown. The wash-houses are full and those who can't go, scrub sometimes the skin off their fingers and spend midday hanging the clothes on the line. They'll be totally dry in about six hours if it doesn't rain. Sunday is a relaxing time, as most folks spend half a day in church, save the Catholics and Anglicans, who attend mass and have the rest of the day to chill. Heathens stay in bed all day and others use the time for family outings to the beach, heading out to the shores for lounging and playing in the salt-spray and White sand. That's how it was for me, growing up on the island."

In a world where we create our own reality, life on an island in the Caribbean is romantic in a lot of ways. But there is no world without its problems.

Children begin socialization from the time they leave their mother's womb. At an early age they are taught, by "responsible adults," how to behave appropriately in the context of their environment. They attend kindergarten through high school and learn manners, how to obey rules, and are provided information about the world and a little of what it takes to survive. You grow up planning to make a contribution to the society that taught you how to live. But what if, for whatever reason, you decide to live or work somewhere else? What happens when people decide to migrate? Culture – that taken for granted set of rules and body of knowledge, the blood connection to our identity – where does it go... what happens to it?

Through social interaction we confirm who we are and understand "our place" in the scheme of things. Identity negotiation is indeed a communication phenomenon. Thus, when we are removed from that original social context, we are thrust into a situation that may involve changes of varying degrees in the condition of both mind, body – at micro as well as macro levels. Goldin (1999) affirms this notion as she suggests, "Processes of displacement, exile, and settlement occur at psychological, cultural and societal levels and these can operate at 'home' as well as 'abroad'," (p. 2).

From the Israelites and other African groups, to indigenous Arawaks and Maya, to Europeans and Asians – "exodus" has been a significant factor in the making of a "new world" – but living together has not been easy. For years

Caribbean peoples have sought a better way of life in foreign countries, in their plight for socio-economic security and mobility. "The essence of Caribbean life has always been movement" (Lewis, 1990, p. xiii).

From the Bahamas in the north all the way down to Guyana, the Caribbean has been a region that has attracted many tourists and curious visitors to its shores, but it has also been a location yet undiscovered by many on an intellectual level. The history of this vast stretch of islands, whose languages, customs and identities remain similar and yet extraordinarily different, began with migration itself. The native Caribs, Arawaks and other indigenous groups now extinct, were present some time before the arrival of the first Spanish ship, and established trade routes within the island groupings as well as routes between North, Central and South America. After the arrival of Europeans, and what was the start of imperial hands redistributing labor, the Caribbean became quite a diverse place. The region took on global characteristics early on and linked portions of Europe and the Americas, Africa and Asia (Chamberlain, 1998). Guadeloupen novelist, Maryse Condé agrees, "Even in the tiny islands of the Caribbean we have already the beginnings of globalization. We have to learn how to live with other people very different from us" (Aidoo et al., 2000, p. 14).

Most important to its history though, is the arrival and settlement of West Africans who were sold as slaves and scattered across the Americas to help build the British, Dutch, Spanish and French empires of the 16th century and beyond.

Individuals of African descent thus make up the majority of the Caribbean's population and have indeed had an impact on what has been documented as these countries' cultures, national customs and identities. However, diaspora studies reveal a complex inconsistency as it relates to identity and Afro-Caribbean people in how race issues are often perceived (i.e., in comparison to African Americans in particular), because of the nature of Caribbean history. Slavery, colonialism, migration, and exile are all part and parcel of the translation of Caribbean cultural identity. Although not referring to West Indians in particular, Cornel West (1993) describes marginalization quite succinctly by suggesting that Blacks maintain a dual consciousness as a result of their search for "White approval and acceptance, and an endeavor to overcome the internalized association of Blackness with inferiority" (p. 18). However, emancipation and socialization of West Indians happened in very different ways than it did for Blacks in the United States, which points particularly to the internalization of inferiority that West discusses. It is safe to say that the Caribbean region only felt and understood the sentiment and not the experience of the U.S. Black Civil Rights Movement and Black power rituals of the 1950s and 60s. Shirley Chisholm (1970), of West Indian heritage and the first Black woman to be elected to Congress affirms this point of view in her autobiography by explaining:

In the islands, slavery was a less destructive experience than it was in the States. Families were not broken up as they were in the South. The abolition of slavery came earlier there, and with much less trouble. In the islands, there have never been the same kind of race barriers. (p. 90)

However, we must not forget that slavery occurred just the same and West Indians have had to maneuver in a post-colonial society nevertheless, where as Chisholm further explains, class barriers prevail to cut across racial lines.

But the problem here is as Waters (1999) maintains: "While people can have a number of different aspects to their identity, often one aspect of themselves will be used by society to define them" (p. 5). Researchers have found that persons who are noticeably of African heritage who are not native to America, but who emigrate to or reside in the U.S. are marginalized in the same fashion as most African Americans have been historically. Kessner and Caroli (1982) note White Americans' attitudes in blurring distinctions between African Americans and Black West Indians in particular. They cite a Jamaican journalist, Jervis Anderson's comments on this type of dual identification:

To the majority of Whites, however clean or careful their public rhetoric (sic), I have been a 'nigger' and to the American Blacks I have been a West Indian. Each of these images has carried its special odium; each has entailed its special burden; each has created its special chasm. (p. 185)

The question then becomes, in the process of migration as West Indians move from one form of oppression in terms of class to encounter another, in the

form of American racial prejudices, how do they adapt? This question leads us into establishing why a study of this nature is important.

Rationale for the Study

Quite often, scholars who research migration and transnational issues pursue investigations of macro rather than micro concepts related to these phenomena. Studies like Palmer (1995), Pessar (1997), Portes and Grosfoguel (1994), Appleyard (1989), Marks and Vessuri (1983), and Bryce-Laporte and Mortimer (1976) have tended to look at such issues as the effect migration has on the original or receiving societies or push-pull factors, the economic and political impact of migration, along with other cause-effect theories. Other studies like Ben-Sira (1997) have dealt with acculturation processes and the stress of readjustment, while Tanno and Gonzalez (1998) address identity across cultures and intercultural communication as major issues with particular reference to specific ethnic groups. A large number of studies on Caribbean migration can also be found emerging from Britain as they have had a large and continually flowing population of Caribbean migrants. But the goal of this research is to present qualitative, interpretive data on the raw experience of Afro-Caribbean women who have migrated from English-speaking countries in the Caribbean to the United States, the Midwest specifically. Very little research has been found in this area, as again the larger concentrations of Caribbean immigrants lie to the

East and South in the United States and this is where the majority of Caribbean immigrant research is based.

Although seemingly small in terms of world geography, the Caribbean region includes a vast array of peoples who speak several different languages based on their shared colonial past and individual histories. Bryce-Laporte (1976) notes the characteristics of the region:

The general characteristics of the nations and territories of the area include small, powerless yet developing countries with a background of colonial plantation slave systems. Further, the economies are still dominated by single cash-crops or raw products of basic commodities, service establishments, and foreign investments... There is a preponderance of people with noticeable African and/or European ancestors superimposed over an almost extinct Amerindian rural type intermingled with Asians, Jews, Arabs, and other Old World ethnic groupings, thus representing a combination of racial mixtures. (p. 1)

It is precisely because of this variety or mixture of peoples from different ethnic groups that make up the Caribbean region, as well the variety in native languages spoken, like Dutch, French, Spanish and English, that in this study I chose to focus on the personal narratives of African Caribbean, English-speaking, female migrants.

Why women? Women have been on average, an absent feature in descriptions of Caribbean history. Although some data on Caribbean women has been published (for e.g. see Shepherd, 1999)—as a research focus, it is merely in its birthing stage. What has seen more development than socio-cultural research is fictional and creative literature about the lives of women by authors

such as Maryse Conde, Paule Marshall, Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and now a flow of newer, contemporary writers. These factors have prompted my attempt to “re-write” history with Afro-Caribbean women’s perspectives included.

In summary, it is hoped that my effort will help to bring about cultural understanding and give voice to a people known to be invisible in American society as well as in traditional academic research. I want to study the process of identity negotiation as it takes place in the lives of Afro-Caribbean women migrants in the United States. First, because the voices of women have been silenced through a lack of recognition and documentation in Caribbean history. Second, because I (the researcher) am a Bahamian, an Afro-Caribbean woman seeking to understand my own identity in a context foreign to my own upbringing. And third, because an attempt to clarify and document the experiences of the women who will be my research informants, can assist in bringing an awareness and understanding of intercultural issues in an era defined by the world’s movement towards becoming a global village. With these three goals, my rationale also includes an understanding of what best ways there may be to capture the essence of Afro-Caribbean women’s lives. I have determined that way to be the sharing and performance of personal narratives.

Fisher (1984) realizes the importance of using narrative as a base to begin an investigation into lives. He proposed a new way of seeing how people communicate in their everyday lives, which he based on the concept *homo*

narrans – that human beings are simply put, story-telling animals. While his research is often connected with rhetorical theory, his message is interdisciplinary. Fisher (1987) continued to promote storytelling as a key function in human life and suggested that human communication consisted primarily of what we choose to tell through reason, value, emotional and aesthetic considerations in story form. Here we begin to see performance studies scholars' enthusiasm and comfort with the usefulness of personal narratives and the ethnographic methods that can be used to capture them. And so, "we live and come to know ourselves in story," according to Madison (1995). "We embrace the term *homo narrans* as a way of describing ourselves, our experiences, and our surroundings" (p. 73). And we create our identities through the stories we tell; this is why personal narrative is so important in our lives, as it is a type of performances through which identification is achieved. Fine and Speer (1992) note:

The principle of performance, particularly narrative performance, is identification, the sharing of identity, rather than rhetorical deliberation. Such performances enable us to understand the Other, even across cultures, since we universally express our lives in verbal performances, most often story performances. (p. 9)

This study will use both autoethnographic and ethnographic methods to uncover personal narratives that describe some of the migration experiences of women of color who move from the English-speaking Caribbean to the Midwest region of the United States.

Definition of Terms

Some terms that may be used throughout this study reflect significant issues as well as carry specific interpretations. Other concepts, I will explain to clarify the study's focus. One must be especially aware that there are distinctions in the terminology used to describe migrants. Jandt (1995) notes the differences between tourist, sojourner, expatriate and immigrant:

A **tourist** visits a country for a short period of time for such goals as relaxation and self-enlightenment. A **sojourner** lives in a country for a limited period of time, from as little as 6 months to as long as 5 years, with a specific and goal-oriented purpose, such as education. The word **expatriate** is more often used to refer to a non-citizen worker who lives in a country for an indeterminate length of time. Many people labeled as **immigrants** in the United States and Europe are in fact sojourners or expatriates whose intent is to work but not to become full-fledged members of the culture. (pp. 277-278; bold mine)

This study focuses on migrants who fall into the categories of sojourners and expatriates, but also recognizes those women who have, through naturalization, become full-fledged citizens of the United States. Regardless of affiliation with other American ethnic groups, it is important that their heritage be underscored and their experiences be combined to reflect their marginalization as a group on the corners of American society.

Sojourners often regard themselves as having only a specific and instrumental role in American society and normally hope to accrue some form of wealth and status, to return to the Caribbean to live as elite members of society (Forsythe, 1976). However, it is also important to note that students and other

sojourners frequently decide to remain in the U.S. and have gone on to play important roles within the American social framework. Persons like, Sidney Poitier and Shirley Chisholm, both born in The Bahamas and others like Louis Farrakan and Colin Powell, both of West Indian heritage – considered African Americans of great note, were indeed Caribbean immigrants initially.

The terms Afro-Caribbean and West Indian are used interchangeably throughout the review of literature and refer to the people of the Caribbean region in general, as well as to informants in the study. But the terms Afro-Caribbean or African Caribbean in particular (whose usages are becoming more and more popular, as opposed to the term West Indian) are used to set the women apart from other ethnic groups that make up the diverse and growing population of Caribbean migrants in the United States as well as those non-migrants within the region itself. Although we are of the same national culture, it is important to recognize the separate or micro-historical contexts from which we originate.

The term “Black” is also used throughout the study, to identify groups with particularly visible features such as the color of skin, hair color and texture, eyes, and other characteristics which set them in a recognizable category of having some connection with the African diaspora. However, the term “Black” also carries with it political underpinnings depending on the context in which it is used. For some, it simply serves as a reference point for meaning in relation to

one's history and nationality. For others, it is used as more of a vague description that carries with it notions of struggle, discrimination, inferior intellect, positionality, class or socio-economic history. I use the term both in simplistic form as well as in political form.

The term identity as defined by Erikson (1959) refers to a kind of psychological organization that may develop during successive phases throughout a person's life. He suggests that identity itself appears in a number of different forms in the individual. At times it may appear as an awareness of one's individual identity; at other times it may refer to an active but unconscious effort to maintain personal character; sometimes it acts as a standard measure for ego synthesis; and yet at other times it can refer to one's effort to maintain membership with a specific group's ideals and identity. Similarly, Hall (1996) refers to many levels of cultural identity, one of which takes into account a collective self-awareness that he refers to as a "collective or true self hiding inside... artificially imposed selves" (p. 4) with common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which allow access to meanings. But besides defining identity as a description of a set of characteristics, behavioral or personal traits by which an individual becomes recognizable, identity can also be viewed as dichotomous, a simple split between: how one sees him/herself; and how others see you as opposed to how you see yourself. This is the more practical sense in which I use the term identity throughout this study, considering both hegemonic

and cultural factors that often show themselves in the human interaction process. But to describe the sense in which identity is used, more specifically, this study seeks to understand what some social-psychologists call reference group orientation.

Social-psychology researchers define identity or what they refer to as self-concept as the sum of one's personal identity and one's reference group orientation. Cross (1991) identifies certain universal variables such as self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, personality traits, etc., that make up personal identity, while variables such as racial identity, group identity, race awareness, etc., make up one's reference group orientation, which are those aspects of self-concept that are more culture, class and gender specific. Cross notes how research focusing on this part of self-concept, often seeks to investigate "differences in values, perspectives, group identities, lifestyles, and world views" (p. 45). He notes, "In a sense, (reference group orientation) represents the ethnographic dimension of self-concept... Every human being relies on people or groups as a point of reference, but which persons or groups one relies on reveals the specific nature of one's group identity" (p. 45). This study seeks to understand the reference group orientation of English-speaking, Afro-Caribbean women who migrate to the United States.

Summary

This chapter has served as an introduction to my research. In choosing this topic, I use my own background and personal history to begin its discussion and present relevant literature as a foundation to assist in establishing the need for the study. I have also provided definitions of relevant terms used in the title as well as throughout the study, in order to decrease the possibility for misinterpretation of terms that may carry multiple meanings.

In Chapter Two, I review literature from a variety of disciplines that have contributed in some way or informed the research process itself. Chapter Three allows the reader to understand the methodology on which the study is based as well as the procedures used to gather data. It is in Chapter Four that you hear the distinct voices of the research informants in narrative form where I reveal the overlapping themes that my investigation uncovered within the narratives. Finally, Chapter Five provides concluding commentary and implications for future research in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

*Somehow, the road home is always
longer and harder than one expects.*
MYRIAM J. CHANCY

In the introductory chapter, I presented my personal standpoint as a motivation for the thesis, asserted the need or rationale and provided definitions of major terms used throughout the study. In this chapter, I begin by discussing the theoretical paradigms that inform the study and how they may be limited in how they can be applied in the analysis of the narratives under investigation. I also identify two researchers, namely Everett Stonequist and Victor Turner whose philosophies and past research contribute significantly to my understanding of migration as a cultural performance. Next, I discuss how the history of the Caribbean has traditionally not included issues of gender, and I establish a need for continued recognition of the role women have played throughout the region's history. This historical review is followed by a more specific, brief overview of the Caribbean migration history that has established precedence for contemporary movements of Caribbean people. Next, I review relevant interdisciplinary studies that fall into the category of transnational literature and discuss how they have contributed to our understanding of cultural identity and the movements of people around the world. Last, but certainly not least, I discuss how Performance Studies as a discipline has dealt

with issues of culture, identity and personal narrative, which informs much of my interpretations of the data and provide a preview of the implications of performance ethnography.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies

Culture, communication and ethnic identity have been subjects of research in a number of disciplines for a long time. Current research maintains the premise that there exists a relationship between individual psychological health and culture (Damji, Clement, & Noels, 1996), specifically in cases where people move across borders to different social environments. In experiencing social and cultural adjustment, individuals also experience different levels of discomfort which can be linked to identity conflict (Berry & Annis, 1974). Identity itself is a unified, purposeful aspect of self and therefore only one segment of self-concept as a whole (Frable, 1997; McAdams, 1995). But identity is also the term most often invoked by those who struggle to create meaning and purpose when culturally significant, ideologically powerful social category systems clash with personal and collective group member experiences (Tajfel, 1978). These struggles become especially important in the context of the United States where issues of diversity have been central in the politics of everyday life.

In the United States, social groups are organized along lines of race, socioeconomic class, gender, affectional orientation, and ethnicity. The groups a society designates are defined not only as different, but as differentially worth, valuable, or capable. Thus, arbitrarily created social

groups are granted dissimilar rights, roles, and opportunities. (Wood, 1997, p. 252)

Marginalized group experiences have been the subject of enormous controversy, especially surrounding issues of race and sexuality. What becomes even more problematic when added to this equation is the issue of gender, which is particularly important in contemporary society as social scientists begin to unravel and increasingly recognize that class, sexuality, gender and race are components of identity that intersect and are multiplicative. It has been particularly feminists as well as other critical theorists that have paid special attention to how these social categories work to both inform and problematize people's life experiences. For example, in the legal profession, intellectuals are discovering how women of color are affected in dramatically different ways by such issues as job discrimination, domestic abuse and rape in comparison to White women. The domestic violence laws for instance, as they are written to protect abused women and punish violent offenders, ignore the ways in which race and gender discrimination combine to exclude women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). In light of this, it is important that we understand that women of color can be affected similarly in other social processes, specifically in the process of migration. Looking at these women's experiences through feminist intersectional lenses is thus an important task for today's researchers. Intersectionality theory makes us aware that the way in which a woman is Black

is influenced by her gender; the way in which she is a woman is influenced by the fact that she is Black and that different forms of oppression may intersect to have a greater impact on the victims of such oppressions. The way in which an African Caribbean woman is Black is quite different from the way in which an African American or Central American woman is Black. Each has a history of enslavement that is different; each has a cultural background that establishes different kinds of personalities because of the organization of their particular society and how each woman is affected through socialization.

Feminist writings have established a strong base for intersectionality, especially the work of Black feminists (see Collins, 1991; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; King, 1988; MacPherson & Fine, 1995; Reid, 1994). U.S. Black women's activism points to the fact that the feminist movement early on and still today privileges the experience of White women and tends to largely ignore or misconceives Black women's oppression profoundly. Intersectional theories have made significant contributions to the U.S. Black feminist movement's understanding of the links between knowledge and empowerment. They encourage new explanations of Black women's experiences as well as reveal new ways in which the organization of domination can be interpreted (Collins, 2000). But more importantly, while these paradigms can help all of us, Collins (2000) recognizes that African American women's experiences when put in a transnational context may differ substantially from the experiences of women of

color around the world. The words of Angela Davis beg repetition in this venture: "Black women scholars and professionals cannot afford to ignore the straits of our sisters who are acquainted with the immediacy of oppression in a way many of us are not" (Davis, 1989, p. 9).

Issues here are further problematized from a Caribbean perspective, which is central in this research. It is good that Black feminist thought puts other Black women in perspective and recognizes that their histories within their geographic homes are different from the experiences of African American women; but it seemingly does not recognize enough, the fact that these women from the outside are here within the boundaries of U.S. culture. Foreign women of color, unless given a voice, have been systematically grouped along racial lines to be categorized similarly to the way in which African American women have been categorized. "Contemporary immigrants have been racialized, defined not in terms of their individual national origins but as Hispanic, Asian, and Black" (Schiller, 1999, p. 27). Schiller goes further:

To be Black in the United States without an ethnic label is to be a person without a history or country. Haitians and other Black immigrants from the Caribbean struggle to define themselves publicly in terms other than Blackness. Haitians speak of not wanting to be 'Black twice'. To be Black once is to be Haitian... But to be Black twice is to accept the designation of Black within the United States - that is, to take on the identity of African American, which is to say not fully American. (p. 29)

Collins' (1991) Black feminist standpoint illustrates how "African American women as a group experience the world different from those who are

not Black and female." She notes, "these concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality" (p. 24).

In the same way, Afro-Caribbean women as a group experience the world different from those who are not Black, female and from the Caribbean. The question is, should these also concrete experiences be considered homogenous and a part of Black feminist thought? My response: not fully.

Standpoint epistemologies play an important role in creating a space for the personal narratives of the Afro-Caribbean women in this study. Denzin (1997) notes how such theories move in two directions simultaneously:

The first direction is toward the discovery of knowledge about the social world as that world works its way into the lives of oppressed people. Second, there is an attempt to recover and bring value to knowledge that has been suppressed by the existing epistemologies in the social sciences. (p. 58)

These are indeed the goals of this research.

Marginalized standpoints have the greatest potential to provide insight into how societies operate in ways that maintain hegemonic structures that affect different social groups disproportionately (Wood, 1997). While Black feminist thought has contributed to the analysis of the narratives of the women in this research project, it is important to understand that it does not explain fully the experiences of African Caribbean women. "There is no single standpoint for the subaltern subject who lives a series of hybrid identities on the borderlands between home, America, Mexico, India, China and elsewhere" (Anzaldúa, 1987;

Chow, 1993; Denzin, 1997, p. 57). My approach views migration as a specific performance space as well as a site of intersectionality where oppressions of race, class, gender, culture and national origin converge.

Stonequist's "Le déraciné" and Turner's Liminality

The fields of performance and communication studies have very deep roots in the social sciences, namely anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics. These fields often have different perspectives on the subjects of performance, culture and identity. A postmodern shift in patterns of thought has caused a focus on interdisciplinary studies to prominently emerge, bringing with it a new attention to the study of performance and culture.

A large number of sources on the topic of migration, cultural identity and more importantly the marginalization of Blacks, stem from the area of sociology. (For examples see Jordan (1968) *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812*, Fredrickson (1971) *The Black Image in the White Mind*, DuBois (1990) *The Souls of Black Folk*, Sollors (1986) *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*.) However, without delving into them all, there is a particular source that deserves some attention in this area, the late Everett V. Stonequist's 1930s work in *The Marginal Man*. The text has been described by some reviewers as one of this century's seminal works that laid much of the groundwork for later studies on marginal populations around the world. Stonequist (1937) calls attention to the reality of the experiences of people

making a transition from one culture to another. Although his observations were made earlier in American history, his explanations of the negative pressures associated with and experienced by ethnic minorities as well as the philosophical underpinnings of his overview of the societal state of affairs in the U.S. are indeed timeless. Stonequist notes, the marginal man, "is one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic, cultures" (p. xv). I respectfully borrow his use of the French term, *le déraciné* to identify or give name to a displaced individual – one who has "lost something of his former self and has not yet acquired a new stable self." It translates as "the uprooted":

The individual who through migration, education, marriage, or some other influence leaves one social group or culture without making a satisfactory adjustment to another finds himself on the margin of each but a member of neither. He is a "marginal man." (pp. 2-3)

We need not search far in order to find acute instances of the marginal man. He may be our next-door neighbour: the economically successful but socially unadjusted immigrant who as a young man left his peasant environment in some distant country to make his fortune in newer and richer lands; perhaps also the native-born son of this immigrant whose career is affected by an unanalyzed hangover of the ancestral heritage; the Jew whose emancipation from the physical walls of the ghetto has not yet freed his consciousness from the subtle but resistant barriers imposed by historic group attitudes. *Farther away perhaps lives the man of Negro, Mongolian, or mixed blood who carries in his face the tell-tale evidence of an alien background, but whose inner personality may be indistinguishable from that of our closest neighbour.* (p. 3; italics mine)

Afro-Caribbean immigrants (particularly first-generation immigrants) in the United States seem to fit this description quite closely and at times rely heavily upon their heritage to maintain a certain kind of identity balance just as some other immigrants do in their transition to life in the U.S. Finding out just how the women of this group achieve or attempt to achieve this balance (i.e., what I perceive as balance) is part of the query of this research.

Much of the theoretical foundation of my work has also been informed by sociologist, Victor W. Turner's philosophical contributions to the study of performance. Migration, in the sense that I am using it here in this research, is a cultural performance or embodied practice, much like Turner's description of a social drama. Similar to Stonequist's *le déraciné*, African Caribbean immigrants who experience maladjustment may be likened to "threshold people" (a term borrowed from Turner) who reside in liminal spaces – in between the culture of home and that of their foreign residences. It was Turner who coined the term "liminal spaces" in his study of performance in everyday life.

Liminal spaces mark a transition from one state to another. A limin is a space in between two places. Turner describes liminality best in his text *The Ritual Process* where he notes:

The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law,

custom, convention, and ceremonial... liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (Turner, 1969, p. 95)

Migrants are sometimes seen as threats to the society in which they enter and the way in which society responds to the stimulus of their interruption can be interpreted as a kind of social drama. There are four stages in the process of social drama:

1. There is a threat to societal order.
2. Societal members sense a crisis or violation of territory and select their position on issues pertaining to the violation.
3. There is an attempt to fix the problem or take redressive measures through self examination in order to return the community to a comfortable state.
4. Peace or order returns to the community.

Using Turner's philosophy to look at the process of migration for Afro-Caribbean women is indeed significant. We can evaluate their experiences in the same stages. For example: Stage 1—the migrants enter and are seen as a threat to citizens' (of the host country) way of life or what is considered normal, everyday life; Stage 2—societal members become acutely aware of their presence, are agitated and take sides on the issue, being for or against the migrants' roles, status or that of their presence itself; Stage 3—people attempt to find ways to either welcome their new guests or force the visitors to recognize that their

presence is unwelcome, and find ways (one of the ways is through immigration legislature) to rid society of them; Stage 4—peace may be restored as native citizens become more accepting of the immigrants' presence or the migrants themselves find safe spaces to occupy or become invisible to natives. But the occurrence of Stage 4 in this sense is questionable in terms of whether or not "peace" is something that exists in American society now that immigrants or those who have been unwelcome throughout U.S. history, have changed the social landscape.

It is then these experiences—these embodied performances, of migrants as they are welcomed or forced to retreat to marginal spaces that stirs the curiosity of this researcher and that this thesis seeks to investigate.

History-Herstory: The African Diaspora and the "Displacement" of Black Women

The experience of the Afro-Caribbean woman ultimately begins with Africa, the motherland. It is the way in which all Black peoples come to be connected or are perceived to be connected through a history of enslavement in the Americas. Investigating what has been written about these women as they might have existed during an era that is often talked about but more often misunderstood, is an appropriate if not perfect starting point for study of their modern characteristics and experiences.

Afro-Caribbean women are indeed remnants of the African diaspora. They are subjects of multiple “displacements” in the context of modern migration – twice or thrice removed from the original culture of Africa if you consider the transatlantic slave triangle and how slaves were separated from their fellow tribesmen and women as well as their families and distinctive language groups. Displacement, according to Bammer (1994) is concerned with the obtrusive colonization of a foreign culture, which when added to the phenomenon of physical dislocation in the form of today’s refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles and expatriates, is “one of the most formative experiences of our century” (xi).

What has been most popularly accepted as the beginning of the history of the Caribbean islands is Columbus’ “discovery” of the Americas and the intercultural contact that took place between he, his crew and the Arawak natives of Watlings Island, which the Spanish captain re-named San Salvador in The Bahamas. The journey that began in Spain as a search for gold erupts into a story of exploitation, struggle and impending globalization, moving through the initial stages of the transatlantic slave trade, emancipation, the achievement of independence for a variety of Caribbean nations and what we have come to know today as the multi-ethnic, dynamic population of people native to the West Indies.

The natives whom Don Cristobal Colon, better known as Christopher Columbus “discovered” were slowly edged into slavery under the initial guise of Christian efforts to convert them. But they quickly died out as a result of harsh treatment and exposure to European diseases. Consequently, African slaves were imported to overcome the shortage of manpower. Thus began what Weatherford (1924) calls, “a scheme of labor which proved to be about the most irreligious and perhaps the most cruel of any forced labor in the world” (p. 92). The first African slaves were brought to the Caribbean in 1502.

As the trading of slaves was introduced and the powers of the Spanish, the English, the French and the Dutch competed for land discovery, ownership and colonization, so the lives of African people were tragically transformed as they became displaced.

The plight of Black women though, in the struggle toward emancipation has gone largely unaddressed in history, with most of the credit for Caribbean “rebellion” in particular, being marked by such names as Toussaint L’Ouverture and Marcus Garvey (examples that are more popularly recognized). Shepherd (1999) suggests that it was not until the 1970s that Caribbean historians began to include information about women in their books. Most early research shows that the slave is seen as product, having no gender specificity in historical description, but rather in most cases assuming a male gender.

C.L.R. James (1938) was one however, who recognized the strength and complexity of the African woman during slavery through making us aware of the female slave's significant contribution to the acts of rebellion and uprising in places like Haiti, Jamaica and Guyana. He provides horrific details that document the treatment of female as opposed to male slaves on the plantation. Lawrence (1984) affirms his argument, but explains it in a way that makes clear James' interpretation. She posits reasons why the Black woman had just as much cause, comparable or even to a higher degree than her male counterpart to rebel against the institution of slavery:

The society into which the African captives were taken was a violent one, and the women did not escape any of this violence. Thus, the slaver accommodated the physical conditions of the pregnant woman by digging a hole in the earth in which her protruding belly could rest, while he tore into her bare back. Any pregnant woman suspected of attempted abortion was put into a wooden collar and the collar never left her neck until she had produced a child. We are also reminded that after the horrors of the Middle Passage, many of these African women were sterile for at least two years. The planters... deliberately worked them to death, rather than wait for them to regain their fertility... (p. 37)

Weatherford (1924) similarly addresses the treatment of women slaves as opposed to men, noting the conditions of women to be "particularly pitiable ...the drivers in using their whip never distinguish sex" (p. 100). Women were expected to do the same amount of work to the same degree as others even while "carrying" a child, that is, when they had not yet given birth as well as within

one month of giving birth, having to carry the newborn upon their backs as they worked in the field.

Perhaps it were these acts of not distinguishing on the basis of gender by slave owners and the extra burden of equally held (in comparison to men), heavy tasks in addition to the responsibility of raising slave children and maybe simultaneously having to care for the children of the Big House, that may have all played a role in shaping the modern identity of the Afro-Caribbean woman.

We go further into historical literature to find that past and present are allied as Bush (1990) asserts, plantation owners advanced the notion of the promiscuous female slave in order to turn attention away from their own immoral acts of sexual violence and exploitation of these women. Stereotypical images of the Afro-Caribbean woman are similar in this regard to those for African American women. The name given to such women is Jezebel, whose image persists to invade the cultural spaces of Black women as they occupy the minds of White America. It is the reason why many negative attitudes persist with regard to the moral disposition of these women.

In connection with images and perceptions of Black women are the roles that they played in slave societies and beyond. Terborg-Penn (1996) writes concerning the roles of colored women, noting African-based societies frequently promote as well as institutionalize via female networks, such values as self-sufficiency and the development of survival strategies. In the same vein, as

Bayard de Volo (1996) explains, a number of authors contend that plantation owners perceived female slaves to be more hard-working than males, having a longer life expectancy and showing a great deal more stamina as they toiled in the dirt of acres of sugar cane. Other contemporary writers on the subject also suggest the notion of an altered feminine identity or a shifting of the concept of femininity and what is stereotypically categorized as women's work, juxtaposed by slave women of the field; This was mainly due to a lack of "feminine" clothing, the fact that children were often separated from their mothers and sold, as well as the fact that women performed the same degree of work as men. All of the above are proof that Black womens' histories in the Caribbean are significant and are at once remarkable illustrations of strength and survival across time, across borders.

So, here is where history or rather, her-story brings us—a starting point that should allow one to begin to gain some perspective on the experiences of African Caribbean women in general.

Caribbean Peoples and Movement: An Overview of Migration History

Emancipation brought with it a number of positive and negative experiences for Blacks in the Caribbean. Slavery in the Caribbean existed primarily on the basis of the success of the sugar industry, which dominated much of the 18th century. By 1838 however, all slaves working in the plantation system of the British Empire were freed. As a result planters began to lose major

control of their work force and the sugar industry declined sharply. The economic systems of the islands began to deteriorate as well and were unable to sustain the pressure of providing fresh jobs for their newly emancipated lot, sparking migration in search for work within the Caribbean basin and eventually migration to Central America (Palmer, 1995). Population growth was also a large part of this equation, and Caribbean people more and more began to seek livelihoods elsewhere. Central American migration mainly filled jobs in the railroad industry and on banana plantations. A large number of migrants also participated in the construction of the Panama Canal between 1904 and 1914. This trend lasted from about 1835 to 1920.

World War II ushered in a new era as some individuals found themselves on enemy soil fighting for the British while the migration trend shifted to focus on agricultural projects and jobs on the mainland that were left open in non-defense industries.

Later we find that the level of the migration phenomenon skyrocketed, as large numbers of Caribbean people flocked to Great Britain after the war ended in 1945. At the time, native Brits did not mind the flow of West Indians who came to fill slots in menial occupations that were considered less than desirable to those interested in climbing the social ladder. However, as the 50s drew to a close, West Indians found themselves in other societal realms competing for

work and as a consequence Britain enacted new laws to restrict the flow of immigrants in 1962.

But the 1960s brought new hope as the British government began to implement changes in the governing methods of the former colonies; such changes had actually been in process since political upheavals rocked a number of islands in the 1930s. Once universal adult suffrage was achieved and each island began to successfully maintain local governing bodies in the 1940s and 50s, Britain decided her colonies were now mature enough to be on their own officially. The islands of Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Jamaica were among the first to become independent nation states between 1962 and 1966. Then the Bahamas gained her independence on July 10, 1973. While most other islands followed suit, smaller islands like Turks and Caicos, Monseratt and Anguilla remained a part of the British Empire.

It was not until the latter part of the 20th century that a significant number of islanders began heading to the United States. A large number of them were Cubans fleeing Castro's iron fist as well as Dominicans. Of those from the English-speaking Caribbean, Jamaica was the source of the majority of migrants. The huge influx resulted in new immigration legislation, namely the Immigration Act of 1965 that implemented ceilings in the number of immigrants that were allowed to legally enter the United States. But this has not stopped the droves of islanders who continue to pour themselves onto U.S. soil with rich

hopes of finding better employment conditions—seeking the best that America has to offer. In essence, America has become a new empire, and the islands have become almost extensions of her borders due to issues of economic dependency and other forms of social influence.

The fact is that cities like New York and Miami, areas to the east and south in the U.S. are now major urban centers that maintain a thriving and active population of Caribbean immigrants. Because of this fact, most studies in Caribbean migration and adaptation have tended to focus on such places as New York, Miami and areas with similar regional characteristics, leaving out such areas as those that do not have large Caribbean immigrant communities. Migration research has also found itself devoid of gender analysis, which as Gordon (1990) maintains has only recently begun to gain attention from migration scholars. Gordon is one of few so far who call for ample recognition of Caribbean immigrant women's experiences. He notes, Caribbean women "are part of an identifiable 'female sector' of the labor force whose experiences are shaped not only by gender but also by race" (p. 116). This study marks an important step in current research not only because it centers on migrants from the Caribbean to the Midwest, but also because it focuses on female migrants, specifically of African descent. It is in this case that we find little established literature that tells of the experiences of such women in the context of their displacement. In comparison to New York, there can be no argument that both

the sociological as well as physical make-up of the state of Iowa offer few points of commonality. It is therefore important that researchers continue to investigate such experiences as those centered in this thesis, which could eventually lead to a more comprehensive understanding and possibly more accurate view of the complex processes related to 21st century migration.

Cultural Identity and Transnational Perspectives

Stuart Hall (1996) suggests cultural identity can be perceived in two ways – one of sameness and the other of difference. He defines the former as a collective true self hiding inside artificially imposed selves with common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide a reference point for meaning. This sameness is truth, he says, “the essence of Caribbeanness’, of the Black experience.” The latter however, he describes as how we position ourselves within past histories, where there are critical points of difference that make up our identity. We thus recognize that there is a “continuous play of history, culture and power” (p. 112).

Each time a member of a particular race is displaced through migration or by any other means, he or she may have to confront their difference. Every society that one walks into reacts in different ways to difference and each time, the immigrant must face the concept of adjustment. Diaspora identities constantly produce and reproduce themselves anew, through transformation and difference: “The diaspora experience... is defined not by essence or purity, but by the

recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by hybridity" (Hall, 1990, p. 235).

But we must also recognize that there are differences on every level, between immigrants and their experiences. In America, immigrants with clear physical differences from the majority White population, are almost guaranteed to experience adjustment differently from say for instance, someone migrating from Eastern Europe. These immigrants (the latter), "including even the Jews, can be more easily amalgamated because they lack distinctive racial marks" (Stonequist, 1937, p. 119). In fact, research has proven that most Caribbean immigrants are not marked as immigrants at all, but struggle to operate in American society as Hispanic American, Asian American, and African American.

And precisely because they have operated within defined structures of society and have sought to resolve their problems and achieve their ambitions within the context of such superimposed larger ethnic or economic status categories as Black, poor, urban, Spanish-speaking, non-White, etc., they are seldom viewed as immigrants or sub-ethnics by the larger society. (Bryce-Laporte & Latimer, 1976, p. vii)

A number of contemporary writers in the Caribbean and the U.S., choose to examine cultural identity through literature. The work of J. Edward Chamberlin (1993) illustrates the importance of literature in the historical shaping of Caribbean peoples' identities and also sheds light on the central role language and dialect plays in the creative imagination. He cites a poem that expresses a woman's dissatisfaction with and distaste for a life of poverty on the

island, which informs her decision to leave, and goes further to tell of the confusion of identity and belonging in her experience of migration to England.

Written by Grace Nichols, a Guyanese poet, it begins:

I leave me people, me land, me home
 For reasons, I not too sure
 I forsake de sun
 And de humming-bird splendour
 Had big rats in de floorboard
 So I picked up me new-world-self
 And come to this place call England...
 ...I begin to change my calypso ways
 Never visiting nobody
 Before giving them clear warning
 And waiting me turn in queue
 Now, after all this time
 I get accustom to de English life
 But I still miss back-home side
 To tell you de truth
 I don't know really where I belaang. (pp. 265-266)

Postcolonial displacement may be caused by a necessary split between self and place (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989) which refers not only to the actual, physical dislocation which occurs, but also includes a kind of cultural defamation in which case the Caribbean immigrant's personality and culture are "oppressed by a dominant racial or cultural model." Those who write from this stand point, in terms of academicians, poets, novelists and others who are in a way exiled from the Caribbean, are writing from a mere remote view of the space of origin – home. And it is in this sense that we must recognize the position of expatriate in and of itself to be a displaced and problematic space.

Location then, is a critical element in the behavior of individuals, including their migration behavior. It does not simply refer to a designated physical space, but incorporates position in social hierarchy and networks of societal interaction (Thomas-Hope, 1992). Afro-Caribbean women who become expatriates as adults have been socialized in their home societies to fill designated roles and participate in local communities based on that socialization. But with migration comes the stress of having to establish new networks of social interaction. A major factor in adjustment for Afro-Caribbean women has been coming into a system in the U.S. where racism, sexism, classism have been institutionalized in far more rigid ways than they are in the Caribbean region. On a surface level, this is obvious if one simply looks at the population demographics of the Caribbean in comparison to the U.S.; the former holds Blacks in the majority while the latter hold them in the minority.

Women's work, their position in Caribbean society as well as their access to resources in an environment where they are considered the norm, is indeed different in comparison to women of African descent who are American by birth, as well as in comparison to other female ethnic groups in the U.S. Over 30 percent of households in most Caribbean countries are headed by women, who thus assume the role as breadwinner for their families (Barrow, 1998). In contrast, American (Black and White) women are still encouraged and socialized to have a male breadwinner for their families. But in no way am I suggesting

that this means that patriarchal constructs have no place in the Caribbean. I am simply pointing out one area of difference that could explain why socialization processes may differ between the U.S. and the Caribbean.

But again, the real problem appears to be that once an African Caribbean woman is removed from her home environment and places her self in the midst of American society, she is perceived upon first glance as being African American and therefore categorized and stereotyped as such, which can have huge implications for the kind of interaction these women experience as expatriates. "While people can have a number of different aspects to their identity, often one aspect of their selves will be used by society to define them" (Waters, 1999, p. 5).

Kessner and Caroli (1982) address the notion of marginalization of Caribbean people in the U.S. through mentioning the differences in perceptions imposed by Americans. They note that White Americans project certain attitudes in blurring distinctions between African Americans and West Indians of color, while the groups themselves can easily determine the differences. The authors cite Jervis Anderson, a Jamaican journalist, who talks about this kind of dual identification:

To the majority of Whites, however clean or careful their public rhetoric (sic), I have been a 'nigger' and to the American Blacks I have been a West Indian. Each of these images has carried its special odium; each has entailed its special burden; each has created its special chasm. (p. 185)

It is this encounter with racism in American society that more than likely unifies the experiences of most if not all Afro-Caribbean people, male or female, Black and even some White immigrants for that matter. It is also likely that it is this intercultural encounter that carves itself into a large chunk of the acculturation stress associated with immigrant experiences in the U.S. In fact, Mmamiki Kamanakao (2001), a University of Northern Iowa graduate student investigating acculturative stress experienced by students from abroad in her master's thesis, suggests in her conclusion that students from Africa experience perceived discrimination, homesickness and hate more than those who come from Asia, Europe, or those from other parts of the Americas outside the U.S. It has also been proven that factors of acculturative stress operate at higher levels in communities such as those in the state of Iowa, where there is greater cultural and behavioral disparity between ethnic groups (Berry & Annis, 1974). Here is one example of not a Black but a White South African woman's experience upon migrating to the Midwest:

My children had easily acquired American accents but I could not change my speech. When I tried I sounded in my own ears too studied, too mocking. The transformation would have to take place naturally or not at all. And it never did happen. So, even if I had been able to acquire an American sense of self, I would not have been so perceived by others: I would see my foreignness in their eyes in perpetuity...The idea of returning stayed with me as a consoling, if impossible, escape through the hard years of my children's teens. I hated the schools they went to, where disorder seemed normal and the life of the mind the refuge of those who were unpopular. I hated the violence the other kids inflicted on mine and the fact that the teachers provided no protection. Nothing could have

prepared me for the widespread, seemingly ineradicable racism of the Midwest. (Bammer, 1994, pp. 173-174)

It is evident that despite the stories of racism and discrimination migrants hear from fellow countrymen (and women), they continue to leave the islands in large numbers, headed for the U.S. and parts of Europe. And though some have been forewarned, they still inhale prejudice and experience the serious culture shock that “nothing could have prepared” them for. Some do it with great fortitude, others retreat in depression.

For ethnic women, achieving a personal coherence of self is a struggle in the face of negotiating experiences of marginalization and displacement. Asserting identity becomes an act of negotiation between private and public, of fragmentation and coherence, of past and present, and of self and other. (Hedge, 1998, p. 37)

It is perhaps a recovery from culture shock or a reaction to it that sends the acculturation process skyrocketing in a different direction. In transnational discourse this is recognized through talk of emerging global identities as well as in discussions of the fluid nature of transnational identity. This is especially apparent when one takes into account that a large number of expatriates maintain familial ties to their country of origin, which brings into view the workings of immigrant hometown societies.

Nina Glick Schiller (1999) notes how immigrants organize hometown associations that sometimes help people face the pitfalls of their new life in the host country and at the same time maintain ties to home. “These ties to old

locations were indicators of the very localized identities of the majority of these immigrants. The state was something they tried to avoid rather than something with which they identified" (p. 20). Although Schiller is referring to European immigrants here, I always believed the same activity was characteristic of Caribbean migrants, especially in states like New York and Florida. Palmer (1995) affirmed this by noting how Caribbean natives preserve their hometown connections because they feel insecure in their relationship with the host society:

The connection with home, which becomes more romantic as years pass, provides important psychological support for people not fully assimilated into their host society... They have maintained their linkage to home through their associations. This bond has sustained them in their efforts to build their lives from scratch in a new society. (pp. 23-24)

Further evidence of localized identities and rejection of an assimilated American identity can be found in Vickerman (1999), who in interviews with Jamaican men, discovered in them a reluctance to become citizens of "this great country" mainly due to racism. One gentleman, identified as "Neil, a social worker" provides a statement of his opinion:

Like a lot of Jamaicans I am not giving up my Jamaican citizenship. I might change my Jamaican citizenship if I was in Africa, but not America. I don't think I will become an American.... I like American people, but I don't intend to assimilate American culture... (p. 171)

In addressing such issues as how citizenship affects identity however, it is important to recognize how the nation-state itself is incorporated into processes of identity negotiation and cultural adaptation. Social power categories within the

nation-state and other hegemonic elements do affect the creation of transnational identities, which as John Watanabe describes, are “not exempt from the forces of a porous but essentializing presence of United States definitions of citizenship and physical distinctions” (Goldin, 1999, p. 9).

In the same vein, Schiller (1999) notes how a dialectic between inclusion and exclusion is developing in the U.S.—one that “disciplines and subjugates transnational migrants by focusing public attention on the degree to which they belong in the United States” (p. 33). Earlier migration trends focused on Caribbean migrants moving for temporary work projects in the U.S. and Britain; so here we see possibly why citizens of these countries would think that these people are only visitors per se. But if you are looking for what is behind this, capitalism is the central link. “The law of capitalism... dictates that the mobility of capital in the global economy gives rise to the mobility of labor” (Lewis, 1990, p. xiv). “As capital moves around the world in search of ‘adequate’ sources of labor, so does labor move around the world in search of better working conditions and new sources of potentially more profitable endeavors” (Goldin, 1999, p. 1).

Finally, in briefly looking at the U.S. as a capitalist state, we must also begin to look at such issues as multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a word that has been tossed around and used with great frequency in recent decades in the United States. It is a philosophy that aligns itself with the democratic republic or nation-state that the U.S. names itself. Yet, it knowingly observes disparity

within the state itself and connects those inconsistencies through racial categories. The flood of West Indian migrants to the U.S. has startling implications for how we think about race and racism. Although it seems the nation-state has conceded the safe spaces that such migrants create for themselves in their associations, a certain intolerant milieu has emerged parallel to national efforts to present America as a multicultural society. The latter in essence, that is the intolerance, is what helps to create problems with identity and adjustment and becomes more real, as we observe its connection to everyday communication and intercultural interaction, again which is far more influential in the process of migrant adjustment to the host society. From this point we can observe how performances in everyday life and the performance of migration are affected by some immigrants' struggle for identity and a piece of the American pie.

Performance Studies: Culture, Identity and The Personal Narrative

Performance is itself an epistemological method — a way of knowing that carries with it implications about how human beings structure their identities and reality. Performance as knowledge and performance as learning has been investigated at length in the field since the late 1970s and 80s.

In Pelias and VanOosting (1987) the field's evolutionary name change from Oral Interpretation to Performance Studies was explored, asserting that it was more than just a quick title switch, but in fact represented a more natural

and essential paradigm shift. This study helped us understand concepts such as “text,” “performer,” and “event,” that were central to how the new name “Performance Studies” expressed a redefining of conventional, interpretive and canonical methods to include new and specific epistemological claims and methodological procedures that favored an interest in community and social activism.

Then in Miller-Rassulo and Hecht (1988), we were presented with a method of performance that was said to influence an audience through the scripting process or what was termed “trigger scripting.” That study focused on the issue of step parenting and illustrated how a carefully designed script can have great social impact by both informing an audience about an issue as well as possibly changing attitudes.

Mann, Hecht, and Valentine (1988), attempted to enhance the trigger scripting method by extending it to test its effectiveness for other types of issues. The authors explored the issue of date rape and the sexual attitudes toward such a traumatic event and found that the method of trigger scripting plus audience discussion was more effective in immediate attitude changes than the use of trigger scripting alone.

But today, there are new issues that are being used to explore performance as an epistemological method. The act of crossing borders in the migration experience itself has caused a major theoretical shift according to

Conquergood (1991). We have begun to reevaluate the way we construct identity as “relational, instead of ontologically given and essential” (p. 184). This again is related to my thesis’ theoretical foundation in intersectionality as Hedge (1998) notes:

The experiences of women of color in their specific material and discursive locations make it very obvious that one is not a woman in addition to being a racial other. Attempts to study race and gender as separate variables result in reductionism, or even erasure, and denial of the total experience of ethnic women. (p. 36)

Much earlier though, Conquergood worked as a participant-observer for three and a half years in a refugee camp in Chicago, among the Lao and Hmong native groups. His 1985 study *Performance as a Moral Act*, documented and established a theoretical framework for ethical issues surrounding the ethnography of performance. Conquergood calls that framework dialogic performance where “different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs... can have a (genuine) conversation with one another” (p. 9) and sets it as having a kind epistemological potential for performance in a way that deeply senses “the other.” He also exposes in an important way, the attitudes that a number of Americans can have in regard to immigrants and refugees, noting how critical audience members were of his affirmation of Lao and Hmong senses of self through his collection of their stories, which were later shared with the academic as well as the non-academic Illinois suburban community.

Welfare workers despise me for making the caseworker's job more difficult. From their point of view, these people must be Americanized as quickly as possible. They simply must drop their old ways of thinking, 'superstitions' and become American. (p. 3)

It is the observation of this particular mind-set that should apply some pressure to performance studies scholars to begin to approach and investigate both senders (those with these attitudes) and receivers (those who feel the wrath of such attitudes) who have experiences in such systems of interaction.

Of important note, is that Conquergood additionally found moral issues of performance to be "more transparent when the performer attempts to engage ethnic and intercultural texts, particularly those texts outside the canon and derived from fieldwork research" (p. 2). We see then, that Conquergood's work has begun to show the implications of doing research on such groups as Afro-Caribbean women migrants, as they can be defined as an ethnic group with personal narratives that are themselves intercultural texts.

Along with being an epistemological method, performance also has the power to shape identity. Through performance, we come to know ourselves and define our position in the world. And we identify ourselves through studying what James Clifford calls "emergent performances" in culture. You are not born knowing who you are or the role you will eventually play in the theatre of the social realm. Soyini Madison (1993) notes how we live and come to identify ourselves in story, embracing what Fisher (1987) termed *homo narrans* as a means

of describing ourselves, our experiences, and our environment. Langellier (1999) also points out “personal narrative embodies cultural conflict about experience and identity” (p. 1). The investigation of performance is then a critical method that we use to understand how peoples “choose to present themselves, how they construct their identity, and ultimately, how they embody, reflect, and construct their culture” (Fine & Speer, 1992, p. 10).

Madison (1993) similarly, in comparison to this study combines Black feminist thought and the performance paradigm, to uncover the ways in which people theorize themselves in different cultures. Her work identified an important oral narrative of an African American female domestic worker and sharecropper (Mrs. Alma Kapper) in Mississippi, at a time when this woman’s narrative would be considered one of the least in importance as well as in visibility. Through poetic transcription, Madison shares this woman’s story and centers the experience of a woman of color navigating the borders of a racist society. In doing this, she illustrates a way of seeing Black women’s experiences through the agency that exists in how Kapper understands and describes her own self and performs the telling of her life history in the Black belt of Mississippi. Madison refers to this kind of knowledge as “theories of the flesh,” noting how the cultural, geopolitical, and economic circumstances of individuals’ lives, help create the space for specific experiences and epistemologies, which in turn cause unique interpretations of reality to emerge (see also Collins, 1988, p.

300). In the same way, Afro-Caribbean women's narratives engender specific kinds of experiences and ways of knowing that assist us in recognizing realities that are different from the realities of other ethnic groups (especially African Americans with whom Afro-Caribbeans are often associated). Our personal narratives then become, operate, or function as theories of the flesh.

In Joni Jones' examination of "self as other" in *Broken Circles* we discover problems situated in the process of performance ethnography and stumble upon dramatic twists apparent in processes of displacement and marginalization. Jones left the comforts of home in the U.S. to explore Yoruba cultural performance in West Africa. What she found has implications for the study of migration and displacement as cultural performance or embodied practice, although this was not her central focus. She noted:

As I performed, I was conversing with the Yoruba, negotiating the truths of my cultural reality with the truths of theirs... (She goes on) My sense of self as other began during fieldwork; however, as an African American living in the United States experiencing my self as other is a ubiquitous reality. (Jones, 1996, pp. 132-133)

Jones felt what probably every Black immigrant (and maybe some of other ethnic origins) feels upon arrival in the host country, specifically in America – invisible. Bryce-Laporte and Mortimer (1976) assert: "It can be said that as a group the people of the Caribbean suffer multiple levels of ethnic invisibility. They suffer much disregard and discrimination, together with native-born Blacks and other non-Whites" (p. vii). I could only smile with a sense of knowing when I read her

lines, "I did not feel that my self, the self I had constructed on U.S. soil, was visible" (p. 133). Her words are very telling and provide us a thick description of how layered and complex that reality, that is the reality of experiencing self as other really is.

Using Conquergood's theory of dialogic performance, Jones shares with us the implications of cross-cultural experiences. She establishes identity as being "situated in a discourse of dislocation" for African Americans and finds that the imaginative, romanticized space of the motherland—"Africa," was simply that alone – an imaginative, romanticized space, as native Africans were not as concerned about the lost brothers and sisters of the diaspora as she expected they would be. All of her experiences document similarities in the experience of some African Caribbean women in coming to America. The U.S. is romanticized as the country with streets of gold, flowing with milk and honey and free opportunities to all who share in the richness of belief in democracy and capitalism. But we find, through a rude awakening no doubt, that the reality is much more complex.

"Performance ethnography," Jones notes "requires an intimate, direct and bodily awareness of one's own culture and the culture of the other" (p. 132). But what are the implications of studying your own culture in the context of migration and dislocation? Does dialogic performance – where different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs... can have a conversation with one

another" (Conquergood, 1985, p. 9) continue to be a way that we can describe studies done on and by members of the same regional and cultural background? Part of the answer may exist in Langellier's theorization that performance then, develops into the way in which we problematize the categorization of "us" and "them" and how we come to know ourselves through the eyes of the "other" (Langellier, 1999, p. 129). Although the context is different in this thesis, the problem is still the same. The elements consist of African Caribbean women (myself included) coming into a cultural dynamic in the U.S. that is dominated by racial categories and having to confront "self as other" for (in all probability) the first time. It is these stories of awakening that I am curious about – personal narratives that explore what it means to be an African Caribbean woman in the United States.

Approaching personal narrative as performance requires theory which takes context as seriously as it does text, which takes the social relations of power as seriously as it does individual reflexivity, and which therefore examines the cultural production and reproduction of identities and experience. (Langellier, 1999, p. 128)

It is the very act of interrogating immigrants' stories that gives voice to those who quite often are not seen or heard. These acts are especially significant in the lives of Black women, for although women have begun to locate their individual voices in the realm of everyday life, it is too often that it occurs through a male dominated system (Carver, 1993) as well as in opposition to paradigms dominated by Whiteness. Stahl (1989) notes how personal narratives

contribute to our understanding of a gendered self-identity and also has implications for understanding the cultural self in everyday life as “personal experience is transformed to cultural experience through the telling of personal narratives” (p. 120). Black women are witnesses to racism as well as gender discrimination; but what can we make of their experiences when in addition to these burdens, we find that some of them are also cultural foreigners? Studies in immigrant folklore illustrate how migrants bring with them the cultural baggage of their homeland, which may include worldviews, religious practices, political styles, methods of child rearing, ways of expressing themselves through the arts, etc. Dégh (1996) discusses how:

Immigrants’ cultural knowledge – peasant self-sufficiency, worldview, oral and ritual artistry – helped them cope in the new situation, but at the same time prolonged their reliance on a heritage that kept them alienated from their homeland and isolated in their new colony from other colonists. (p. 385)

In continuing to recognize the importance of narrative research, Park-Fuller (2000) sets autobiographical performance center stage as she recognizes how conversational personal narrative, collective group stories and therapeutic storytelling all play a role in our understanding of how the staged personal experience story can be seen as testimony. She explains:

Unlike confessional practices which... contribute to the recuperation and reinforcement of dominant norms following individual transgressions... testimony... is, of itself, a transgressive political act performed without repentance. It is an artistic declaration of personal experience given by a witness despite constrictive taboos. (p. 22)

Park-Fuller's recognition of Alcoff and Gray (1993) bears repeating here: "A witness is not someone who confesses, but someone who knows the truth and has the courage to tell it" (pp. 287-288). We must begin to become willing witnesses ourselves and seek out other witnesses, especially women, all of whose narratives can assist us in making our *homo narrans* fuller and more complete than ever before. And perhaps we must begin to allow these narratives to be performed more by the tellers themselves, as Carlin (1998) shows us through her collaboration with rural women in the telling of their farm crisis narratives for the Smithsonian Folklife Center and the American Folklife Festival in 1996. In reflecting on personal narrative research she notes:

I learned that such transformations and extensions of story performance can contribute to a group whose narratives did not have wide audiences before... As ethnographers, performers, directors, and writers, we provide access to stages and audiences which can make personal narratives heard as never before... A personal narrative is larger than its verbal text or one performance event. (Carlin, 1998, p. 228)

Although scholars like Jones, Madison, Langellier, Conquergood, Park-Fuller, Carlin, Stahl, and others have done studies and established approaches to cultural performance, performance of personal narratives and performance ethnography that reflect acute connections to the focus of this thesis, the goal of this research is to add to body of knowledge on migration as an embodied practice or cultural performance in and of itself, within the field of Performance Studies.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explored relevant literature concerned with intersectional paradigms and the embodied performance of border crossing. Beginning with a link to Black feminist research, this chapter also reviews some historical literature and how Black women in particular have informed new perspectives and patterns of writing in Caribbean discourse. In addition, I presented a brief look at the work of sociologists Everett V. Stonequist and Victor W. Turner as they have made significant contributions to our understanding of marginalization and to my theory of migration as an embodied cultural performance. I have also attempted to provide a brief overview of Caribbean migration history to present background information that would help readers see the connection to present day trends in the movements of these peoples to the U.S.

Stuart Hall has had a deep influence on my understanding of cultural identity and his definition of the term is emphasized because of his status in the field of Cultural Studies as well as because he is an author of Jamaican heritage. I have also found a vast and growing body of work that is interdisciplinary in nature that has focused on the experiences of migrant, which I categorize as transnational literature, since its influences seem to stem from a variety of fields and not any one profession.

The literature has shown that there is a gap in our understanding of traveling cultures and that that gap must begin to be filled in with a new focus on people of color and women in particular. We must attempt to cease the categorization of contemporary immigrants as Black, Asian and Hispanic.

The final area in the literature review attempts to look at Performance Studies perspectives on cross-cultural encounters and how the field's contemporary focus on identity has influenced our impulse to focus on and use personal narratives in staged performances. This part of the review grounds my research, establishes implications for my work in turning my informants' interviews into a fully staged production and allows me to introduce patterns of thought in the field that will influence my analysis of those in-depth interviews.

Together, the literature reviewed has assisted in my understanding of my own experience as an expatriate and has guided my thinking regarding migration, cultural identity and Afro-Caribbean women. The next chapter will detail the procedural methods I employed in my investigation to uncover the personal experience stories of Black women from the Caribbean who live in Iowa. Then Chapter Four will present the results of those interviews and an analysis of some of the themes occurring in their stories. Chapter Five will draw the preceding chapters together in an attempt to assess this thesis' contributions to the field of communication as well as explore future implications of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

*With the rupture in cultural and communal continuity
brought about by immigration, reminiscence becomes
essential to personal as well as cultural survival.*

BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT

The purpose of this study was to attempt to gain an understanding of cultural identity negotiation processes as they exist in the lives of African Caribbean women who have migrated to the United States from the English-speaking Caribbean. I wanted to investigate cultural identity as a communicative, performance event through interpreting the personal narratives of other Black women who are immigrants in a similar situation to my own. This chapter presents the methodology for this study.

A Qualitative Approach

I opted to utilize an inductive, qualitative approach in the research process while grounding the study in a feminist theoretical perspective. Both the qualitative approach and the feminist perspective align themselves *in opposition* to positivist views that there is a separation between the researcher (the knower) and that which is being researched (the known). Langellier and Hall (1989) note, “what is known and what is understood is accessible only through the researcher’s consciousness and in her relationship to the researched” (p. 194). I

use my own experience as well as the experiences of the women who acted as my informants as qualitative evidence.

Normally, emotional or personal connections both which imply that the researcher brings elements of his/her own background and identity into the study, are labeled as researcher bias or subjectivity. It is a term that traditionally has been perceived to have negative connotations and evidenced irreparable flaws in the research. Consider, however C. Wright Mills (1959), who notes “the most admirable scholars within the scholarly community... do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other” (p. 195).

Consider also Glesne and Peshkin (1992):

The subjectivity that originally I had taken as an affliction, something to bear because it could not be foregone, could, to the contrary, be taken as “virtuous.” My subjectivity is *the* basis for the story that I am able to tell... Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than exorcise. (p. 104)

My identity as an Afro-Caribbean woman was central to the relational dynamics of the interviews that I used to collect the data. And my own experience played an important part in the motivation for the study as well as its interpretation. So my approach is indeed, both ethnographic and autoethnographic. I participated in and observed the women in a group interview situation as well as conducted several one-on-one interviews. The

resulting conversations that occurred in those contexts provided a space for their individual personal narratives to emerge.

Ethnography and Autoethnography

The primary objective of this study was to collect personal narratives that voiced Black women's opinions about their migration experiences. In using ethnographic methods to acquire research data, I collected personal narratives through audio tape recording one-on-one interviews and used both audio tape and video tape recording for our group interview session.

"Ethnography is an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context" (Tedlock 2000, p. 455). That specific event in this case is migration, which through this study, I construct as a cultural performance for Afro-Caribbean female migrants in the context of the U.S. Ethnography also involves according to Van Maanen (1988), "representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others" (p. ix). However, Van Maanen, in this instance, spoke particularly of researchers entering foreign cultures in more traditional and earlier forms of ethnography, in which case, social scientists were most often White males. H. L. Goodall (2000) refers to such traditional ethnography as belonging to an era in which there was a crisis in representation and affirms that the world of ethnography has evolved so much today, that such a crisis is slowly but surely, being weakened. Goodall explains how postmodern

standpoints have played a role in creating a truth that is no longer a privileged, White, male, scientific truth, but a more accurate view of reality as marginalized persons continue to join the ranks of the scholarly community to write about their own lives and the lives of their people. He writes:

Because representation is literally about *re-presenting* a reality, which assumes a *correspondence between language used to create the representation and the reality that gets represented...* The ethnographer's task was to get as close to the truth of a given reality as possible through the application of scientific reasoning.

One of the gifts of the postmodern challenge has been the cool but sometimes chaotic dismantling of this model of representational truth telling. Postmodernists assert that the logical assumptions and scientific methods guide – some say, privilege – a particular reasoning elite's consensual view of reality: the grand narrative (Lyotard, 1984) of Western, mostly White, mostly male, science. The problem with this construction of rationality is that there are "realities" more so than there is a "reality." What counts as the truth depends on where you are standing when you observe or participate in it, what you believe about it in the first place, and what you want to do with it. (p. 12)

My writing in this thesis is therefore considered a new form of ethnography, as I locate myself in American society and locate the other research participants as well, as outsiders, marginalized and oppressed by dominant cultural patterns and beliefs about race. It is here in this study that I therefore claim the importance of mine and my sisters' standpoints.

Van Maanen (1988) went further to say,

To write an ethnography requires at a minimum some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written-about group... Such matters represent the ways of being and seeing for members of the culture. (p. 13)

Autoethnography today, and more specifically native ethnography indeed break the barriers of these minimum requirements. Tedlock (2000) agrees as she suggests:

Writing for and about the community in which one has grown up and lived, or at least achieved some degree of insider status, should produce engaged writing centering on the ongoing dialectical political-personal relationship between self and other. (p. 467)

Native ethnography is defined as research embarked upon by members of Third World groups who write about their own people (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Such is the case in this particular study. Since I was born in a country in the Caribbean region and shaped by similar cultural values and norms in comparison to the women who chose to participate in this study, and I have chosen to focus on a group with which I identify ethnically, I do indeed have a large degree of insider status. My in-depth knowledge and personal experience as it relates to the group under investigation allows for a more accurate interpretation of the findings as well as makes me able to relate to the research participants on a deeper level than another individual with no prior insider status could. In fact, Crawford (1996) explains:

Taking the ethnographic turn, living and writing the ethnographic life, is essentially a self-report of personal experiences. Ethnography, then, becomes autoethnography because the ethnographer is embedded in the ethnography one way or another, manifest in the text, however subtly or obviously. (p. 158)

So, just as my methods can be described as ethnographic, they can also be described as autoethnographic and belong to a native ethnography category as well. The autobiographical account in the introduction to this thesis as well as my participation in the group interview and inclusion of my own comments during taping are all part of what makes this study autoethnographic in nature. In addition, the data that stems from the scripted, staged performance of the women's personal narratives (SAFE PASSAGE) which is found in the individual interviews section of the findings (in Chapter Four) includes parts of my own personal story as I struggled to make a transition from life in The Bahamas to life in the United States.

"Autoethnography, native ethnography, self-ethnography, memoir, autobiography, even fiction, have become blurred genres," according to Ellis and Bochner (2000). They suggest that, "perhaps the loose application of the term autoethnography only signifies a greater tolerance now for the diverse goals of ethnography and a better understanding of the fallibility and indeterminacy of language and concepts" (pp. 742-743).

Informant Selection

Informants for this study were selected from the population of residents in North Iowa. The only qualifications for their participation were that they originate from any of the English-speaking countries or territories within the Caribbean region and that they reside temporarily or permanently within the

borders of Iowa. Although length of stay did not initially factor into their selection, I found after completing a pilot study that there were differences in the richness of the women's reflections on their experiences, based on whether they had recently arrived i.e., within the last two years or if they had lived in the U.S. for more than two years. The women were sought out through e-mail inquiries and invitations extended to universities or learning institutions within the target area as well as through word of mouth, i.e. through investigating acquaintances' social networks to find whether or not they included women from the Caribbean. There were ten women found in the search process, who eventually agreed to participate in the study.

Data Collection: Qualitative Interviewing

Using lived experience as a unit of analysis, in-depth qualitative interviews were utilized as a method of data collection to draw out the personal narratives of the informant's immigration experiences. The interviews took place with the informed consent of each participant, who read and signed a release approved by the University of Northern Iowa's Human Subjects Review Board. Permission to conduct such research was also allowed by the review board. See Appendix for sample consent forms.

The interview as a method is particularly valuable in gaining access to women's experiences as it allows them the agency to be their own storytellers (Armitage, 1983; Gluck, 1979). Women are often characterized as being natural

storytellers through everyday speech acts as they are noted to possess a conversational style of storytelling that is particular to their gender (Langellier & Hall, 1989).

Group and individual interviews occurred within the span of a year and were documented and transcribed via a cassette tape recorder. In building rapport, I instructed the interviewees to allow the interview process to resemble casual conversation and showed that I was open to wherever they wanted to go in describing their experiences. Using a feminist approach allowed us a two-way dialogue that incorporated disclosure of accounts related to my own migration experiences. I conducted semi-structured interviews with all 10 participants, (7 women of the 10 were interviewed individually; while another combination of 8—including myself, participated in a group interview) that posed questions related to three specific areas: (a) identity, (b) race, and (c) adjustment. The questions were mostly open-ended in nature and were constructed in an effort to guide the women's reflections on their migration experiences. Although the questions were prepared prior to going into the field, they were not a strict rubric to which I attempted to adhere. Instead, I allowed the informants to lead the way in revealing their experiences. Therefore, the following list of questions only acted as a general reference or guide for individual interviews:

Questions about identity

- Who are you? What would you say are some of the characteristics, traits, attributes that make you who you are?
- How did you see yourself in your native country?
- How does your home society view women? What is the perception of women in your native culture?
- How do you think others (in home environment and host country) see you, personally?
- What would you say has been taught to you by your parents and siblings about how a woman should behave in your culture? How were you taught to see yourself as a woman? ...By your family, friends, church, government? How do you think it affects you now?
- What do you think is the role of women in your culture?

Questions about race

- Do you identify yourself as being of African descent? How do you know that you are/are not of African descent?
- How many different kinds of people would you say there are in your home culture? How are people categorized (if they are) in your country?

- Does racism exist in your culture? If so, how did racism affect you in your home country?
- How would you describe how you think people in American culture view Afro-Caribbean people/women?
- Have you had any experiences where you felt you were discriminated against on the basis of skin color?
- How would you define race?

Questions about adjustment

- What was your reason for leaving your native country?
- Do you plan to return?
- Does your family still reside in your home country? Where are they if they are not there?
- How often do you visit your native country?
- Besides visiting, what other methods do you use to stay in contact with family or friends who may be still living at home?
- What do you intend to accomplish in the U.S.?
- What did you hear about living in the U.S. before you came here? Did family or friends tell you of their experiences in this country? What did they say?

- Did your family's or friends' experiences inform your decision to migrate in any way?
- Did you experience culture shock upon arrival?
- How soon after your arrival did you experience this?
- Were you home-sick?
- What did you miss the most?
- What do you like/dislike about the U.S.?
- Do you want to go home? If so, why?
- Do you want to stay in U.S.? Why or why not?
- Do you plan to apply for citizenship, if you haven't already done so?
- Do you feel like you have become/are becoming Americanized since your arrival in the U.S.?

These questions as well as others that were asked in the moment of each interview, sought to answer the two larger questions guiding this research:

1. What are the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women in the process of migration and in their encounter with America's system of racial relationships?
2. In their personal narratives, are there parallels or certain themes that are echoed and can help us understand them as a group from similar backgrounds?

Analysis

The data for this study includes transcripts of both a group interview session as well as individual interview sessions that took place with each of the eight participants. In using data from the transcripts of the group interview, I sought to arrange what emerged as the women's personal narratives, into separate themes that described their motivations, feelings, actions and behaviors that resulted from the process of making adjustments to their new ways of life in the United States.

The data were encoded using pseudonyms, as confidentiality was promised to each informant. Their actual names appear only on the original informed consent releases they signed as well as on labels used to identify individual cassette tapes on which their voices were recorded.

Also a part of the analysis was a performance script that was created during the transcription process. I composed, directed and choreographed a staged performance using three of the women's stories that were told during individual interview sessions. I also included monologues and poetry that described my own migration experience along with references drawn from the data and current academic literature on the issue of Caribbean migration. The performance took place February 21-23, 2002 and was presented with a cast of six performers including myself before an audience made up of faculty, students

and members of the public on the University of Northern Iowa's Cedar Falls campus.

Using interview transcription, it was through the scripting process that I endeavored to capture the thoughts, memories, stories of the women in the study and examine the general themes that emerged from such qualitative evidence. I saw myself as an information conduit and a means by which the stories of the informants could be conveyed. This concept of "co-created" or "co-authored" narrative is explicated in a number of qualitative research texts and the process of analyzing the qualitative evidence in this study resembles a grounded theory approach. Stratton (1997) notes that grounded theory is based in a constructivist paradigm and can also be construed as an interpretivist framework for analysis:

This position recognizes that meaning is not something inherent in a reality 'out there' but is constructed by the individual. Research is not seen as finding things that are there, but of creating meanings... negotiating ways of understanding... Interpretation then involves deciding what conclusions can be drawn from the presence or frequency of various aspects of what is produced. (pp. 116-117)

In examining the evidence gathered, I attempt to describe the cultural reality of the Afro-Caribbean women in the study and recognize the patterns that may exist in the narratives that could help us understand their experiences of migration.

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of cultural identity negotiation processes in the lives of African Caribbean women who have

migrated to the United States from the English-speaking Caribbean. In theorizing migration as a cultural performance, I interpret the personal narratives of other Black women who are immigrants in a similar situation to my own, in order to: give voice to a people considered an invisible population of U.S. immigrants, particularly in the Midwest; to assist in understanding my own experience as an Afro-Caribbean woman; and to help scholars and lay persons recognize our perspectives or observe our truths, which can provide some insight in intercultural relations in the U.S.

Summary

In this chapter I have included a description of my research methodology. I discussed how my approach to the research is steeped in the qualitative tradition, provided an overview of how informants were selected for the study, discussed attributes of qualitative interviewing as a method of data collection and explained how the data in the study is analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the findings of the study by providing interview transcription from conversations between the informants and myself, which formed the basis of each woman's personal narrative about her migration experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Shared stories provide significant ways of understanding the world. In oral cultures, elders tell life stories for the edification and socialization of children in the community. Knowing how and why such stories are true is part of the process of maturing, and is fundamental to intellectual, emotional, and social development. To understand one's own life in light of these stories is to be a full participant in a particular culture.
(Barbre et al., 1989, p. 261)

This qualitative study looks at the personal narratives of Afro-Caribbean women who have migrated to the United States from Jamaica, The Bahamas and Trinidad. In this chapter I explicate the themes that emerged after months of collecting data through individual interviews as well as holding a group interview session with some of the women who agreed to participate in the study. Here I seek to provide the words of the women themselves in how they described their experiences as well as how I interpret my own experience in relation to some of theirs.

The chapter is divided into two sections. "The Group Interview" section presents themes that emerged from within the conversations the women and I had during our group meeting. Later in the chapter, in the "Individual Interviews" section, I explain how the scripting process for the staged performance ("SAFE PASSAGE") of the narratives, which included data collected during individual interview sessions, played a role in enhancing the themes found in the process of analyzing the group interview. In both sections

transcription of individual narratives are included as well as dialogue that occurred between the women in the group interview and the dialogue that occurred in individual interviews.

The following themes, in summary, represent the result of my analysis and answer the research questions originally posed at the onset of this study, which are:

1. What are the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women in the process of migration and in their encounter with America's system of racial relationships?
2. In their personal narratives, are there parallels or certain themes that are echoed and can help us understand them as a group from similar backgrounds?

The group interview captures those experiences asked about in the first research question. Research question two is answered through the analysis and discovery of the themes I will describe here.

Theme 1: "From first to lasting impressions," details the first moments of some of the participants' arrival in the U.S. In a number of instances, the women's departure from their homeland to the U.S. became a significant experience, as some of them had never traveled by plane and this was their first experience outside of their own countries. Two of the women cite instances where they first realize that they are a racial minority; they talk of seeing Whites for the first time and discuss their reactions to such circumstances. Here I also

found that some women, who had come initially with specific goals (e.g., schooling) and intentions to return, have a change of heart and decide to remain in the U.S.

Theme 2: "A Cultural Conflict: African Americans, Education and Work," discusses the experiences of some of the women who came as young children and were forced to adjust to the American educational system. Here I found that some of the women sensed the existence of a tension between African Americans and themselves in their interaction or lack thereof, which seems to stem from differences in how Caribbean immigrants value both education and work.

Theme 3: "Discrimination and Identity: Blackness or Nationalism," explains how ideas about race, and the discrimination that occurs as a result of those ideas held by Americans in general, forces the women to struggle with identifying themselves as "Black," as they both resist and have no desire to be linked with negative stereotypes associated with American Blacks. While preferring a "Black" sense of self in understanding their heritage, the women seek to qualify their Blackness as originating outside the boundaries of the U.S.

Data that resulted from individual interviews was used to form a performance script that included some of the women's personal stories as well as some of my own accounts of my migration experience. These stories formed the basis of three sub-themes: "Growing up on the Island," "Defining moments

where race became important,” and “Identity: Media and Language,” all of which worked to augment what was found later in the group interview session.

The Group Interview

November 24th, 2001 – I enter Ruth’s house eagerly with my equipment. The women are all waiting upstairs in the TV room, chatting and chewing away on the mouth watering roast that Ruth had had prepared for the evening. She was nice enough to volunteer her home as a venue for this group meeting to take place. Ruth is 48, the eldest of the women, married and born in Jamaica. She was very happy that I was doing a project of this nature. And so I enter and greet the women. Those who didn’t know each other, I introduced. So, there were six Jamaican women and two Bahamian women there, including me. The two Trinidadian women were out of town that weekend and couldn’t make it. But we had so much fun together.

It was a small room, but very cozy. Beige leather furniture, a bar table and stools, paper blinds and a huge television set. A beautiful glass coffee table with silver legs sat in the middle of the room. It was a perfect place to chat and relax. After most of the dinner was done, I turned the camera on and pushed the record button on my tape recorder. There was a lot of laughter in that room that day. Leslie, 21, of Jamaica had sampled the punch and marveled at it, making some indistinct vocal sound that the other women recognized as her approval of it’s sharp and unique taste. Ruth asked, “You like the punch?” Giggling, she

answered “hmmm-mm,” and we all started wondering what was in it. So our conversations began with the subject of the perfect punch. I argued that it had to be pineapple juice and 7-up that were the main ingredients. Evelyn, 41, of Jamaica thought it tasted like sherbert really. Ruth joked about almost overdosing on the stuff and we all laughed. As she began to tell us about that experience, which occurred at some function with her husband, he walked in right on cue to greet us all – the women that his wife was telling him about. We were all formally introduced and then he bowed out to let Ruth entertain us.

From First to Lasting Impressions

I finally asked the women to take turns sharing stories about their departure from their respective homes to the U.S. I asked them to reflect on the first day they came to this country – to tell about what kinds of thoughts they remembered having from the moments of their initial arrival; what kinds of plans they had and how those may have changed as they stayed within the U.S. and began “new” lives. Ruth, the eldest, was the first to speak.

Ruth: I was thirteen and I came here because my parents wanted me to come here. Let’s see I remember being in a huge place in the Chicago airport and then the next thing I remember was – and then I was in high heels, you know back then we used to dress up, all suited up and everything. It was 1967. Anyway, so the only thing I remembered about that trip was I wanted ice-cream and the stewardess said ‘you want cream?’ you know. And so I said ‘yes’ – at thirteen you know, I’m thinking ice cream. And she brings this thing to me and coffee and I’m like ‘what is wrong with this woman – what is this cream for, you know’. So that was my first thing, and then I got to the airport and I met my Mom. I hadn’t seen her in I don’t know how long, seven years at least –

six years. And she had some friends who went by my house, we put some stuff up and went to Charles City, Iowa - and I spent the summer there. I really didn't have any thoughts, you know. I met my sister, my middle sister for the first time and you know, I just thought oh - "whatever." I was just kinda "whatever" for quite a while.

Ruth was not the only one who was brought to America to live, at an early age. Two others, Evelyn and Tamela had similar beginnings. Evelyn again is 41, married and of Jamaica. Tamela was also born in Jamaica and was 29 at the time of the interview.

Me: Okay Evelyn tell us about your experience.

Evelyn: (She sighs as if to prepare to tell a long history) Well, that was like thirty something years ago. I came here in 1972... July 13, 1972 and I was only twelve, at the time. So, basically I really didn't have a choice but I'd always wanted to come here, you know people talk about America - the streets are paved with gold you know... you could just walk down the street and pick up riches that this country has to offer - All those propaganda nonsense. But, when I first came here, I came to Chicago and my mom and one her friends came to the airport to pick me up... and ahhh you know, there was you know lots of traffic, lots of cars on the road and all these different kinds of things. 'Cause I came from the country back home; I had to go to the city to get on the plane and come here, so that was interesting. And when we got home, my mom lived on the third floor of an apartment building - that was a surprising thing to me, to have people stacked on top of each other like that, 'cause I wasn't used to that kind of thing. And, that was an experience. Even today I stay away from windows, 'cause you know, I'm sort of scared of going to close the window - if I fall it wouldn't be a good thing.

Tamela: Well some part of my story is similar to yours. When I came to America, I still hadn't figured out why my parents wanted me here, but I'm not going there. But, I was ten, and I remember it was March 23, 1982. And we packed up... I still didn't understand why we were packin' up all our stuff... And I know we were comin' to this place that was supposed to be better than Jamaica, and all was gon' be well. And so, we packed up and we got on the plane and I came into Miami International

and that was, I was like hey, Miami International is huge. I mean it's huge. I remember, sitting in the immigration office waitin' on our visas and our green cards and it was like two hours; And then we had to go through these lines and customs and, all this time we were stuck. Then we had to wait on my step-father to come and get us from the airport 'cause he was working and he couldn't get off 'til a certain time. We were out there for like hours and "oh, I hate this place" (laughs).

In all three of the preceding narratives, the women talk about how it felt to be in new surroundings. Their depiction of the U.S. as a new place that they find themselves in reflects some of the differences between Jamaica and here. They describe the size of the airport and the amount of traffic on the street, which in comparison to home is probably multiplicative. Their stories also show how the process of migration begins by looking at the grand scheme of things, having no inkling of how their lives might change. As their stories progress they lead into the more specific experiences that come in everyday life.

Fear of Whites. Two of the other women, Leslie, 21 of Jamaica and Samantha, 30 of the Bahamas, talked more about their first impressions of the people that they observed in their initial moments of arrival. Both expressed fear of Whites because of what they had heard about race issues in America prior to their arrival as well as because of the sheer numbers of them that they observed in comparison to the small numbers of them that exist on the islands from which the women originated.

Leslie: That was my first time ever flying. And well, I was excited yes when we went on the plane. Scared when it took off, 'cause you know it kinda tilt right? And then there's like the sea down there so I was like

okay the plane is going to go in the sea. I was like scared 'cause I got a window seat. Then there was like this little girl sittin' beside me – she's like all long foot in the chair, you know not recognizing nothing and I'm like 'okay nothing e'en touching the seat.' (The women laugh) That was January 2, 1999. Then when we landed, that was like a good experience, found my way – thought I'd get lost – tried going on down the escalator thingy (she giggles) and I couldn't come off. (We all laugh) Then I saw these people walking pass me, lookin' like, you know jus' trying to... Then I had these slipper-like shoes on and den dey fell off 'cause I was trying to like jump off, ya see. The next thing, I end up comin' in a skirt 'cause I forgot that it would be like real cold. But I had a sweatpants in my bag, so when we went through Miami, I kinda felt cold so I was like okay, then I went and change and put it on. Then, going to North Carolina it was like all kinda White people, that's the first I've ever seen so many White people, like one time. Then when we reach, me a praying. So, I was thinking on coming back home – that was my main plan, jus' go and do what I have to do and den come back home.

Samantha: I was scared... I was scared of White folks, I'd never seen so many White folks in my life and I was just not used to that and I wasn't prepared for that. But um, after that it got better, you know, I went to class the next day. I always sat up in front because I didn't want to be sittin' behind these bunch of White people you know. My brother always told me oh, let them eat your back (the women laugh) so, I always sat in front so that they could eat my back. But anyway... so that was my first experience coming to the U.S. – being afraid of the little White people I saw there, just missing home horribly.

Listening to what they describe as their initial fears made me reflect on my own.

In Chapter One I described the differences between the experience of my arrival in Florida versus my arrival in Iowa, where the population demographics show a sharper contrast in Whites over Blacks. I too had a fear of Whites in the beginning. I note:

"Few things reminded me of home in that little town in Florida. But there seemed to be enough similarities in the culture of the South in addition to the warm climate that helped me blend in with the woodwork and function effectively in my work and social environment from 1995 to 2000. Iowa however, was very different. It was not until my journey to graduate school in the Midwest that I felt such feelings of anxiety and confusion... I had never seen snow, never experienced winter... and not to be funny or anything, never seen so many White people in the same place. I drove from Florida to Iowa non-stop. I had heard so many stories on the news, from acquaintances, friends, about racial problems in America, I was determined as I was alone, not to stop and rest at a hotel along the way" (see page 2).

Fear of Whites is a significant factor that affected the experience and adjustment of all three of us. It is a part of the culture shock experienced by these women and myself and may just play a huge role in our perceptions of and interactions with Americans in general.

To stay or return: A change of heart. As Leslie and Samantha went on in each of the preceding narratives, they also talked about plans to return to the islands. Out of both narratives came another sub-theme that I think depicts a change in the attitudes of the women toward living in the U.S., which assists in grounding their experiences in the broader theme of "From First to Lasting Impressions." We can see at the end of Leslie's opening story that initially she planned to return to Jamaica. But she continued that narrative with a change of heart:

Leslie: So, I was thinking on coming back home – that was my main plan, jus' go and do what I have to do and den come back home. But now, everything is changed. I don't wanna go back home to live.

Me: Why?

Leslie: Well, for one, I found my Jeff and here is like, more opportunity here I see it's like more opportunity here. And then, when I call home and stuff my brother be like there's nothing here, there's nothing here – you just take what you can get here – So...

Me: But has your picture of the U.S. back then when you first came, changed in any, to what it is now – to what you know now?

Leslie: Yeah. 'Cause I thought it was like, pot o' gold or whatever, that's what I thought of the U.S. was like. But when I came it was like almost, the only difference was like, where when... in North Carolina it's like almost the same as Jamaica really – just the weather was different. But everything else was like the same. 'Cause where I was, like, was like a Black neighborhood so, there were like Black people there. People from Jamaica, Bahamas, so I didn't really like miss anything like, apart from the food; that was the only thing I missed.

Prior to Samantha's explanation of her fear of Whites she also mentioned how her initial plan was to come to the U.S., fulfill her educational goals and then return home. She actually began:

Samantha: Well I first came ahhh, December of '88. I was like fresh out of high school and um... my brother had traveled with me, he had come to bring me to college. I wasn't really expecting anything much really. I mean, as far as I was concerned I was just coming to get my education and go back. It's all I was really looking forward to and I was just really thankful for the opportunity. You know to do that – And then when I got to Dayton, like her you know, I was really shocked to see so many White people, I mean he told me that there were gonna be a lot of them but I wasn't expecting it was gonna be this much. And like he had gone to this school like 10 years, 10 or 12 years before me – this was his alma mater, you know. And so, basically I guess I was just following in his footsteps, I really didn't you know, have much of a choice as to where I was gonna go to college. But, if it were my choice, I probably would have ended up somewhere in Florida or whatever have you. But lookin' back at it, you

know, I can't complain. It was a great school and I got a good education there.

Following this part of the narrative, Samantha went on to explain her fear of Whites, which I previously mentioned. She began to talk of missing home at the end of her narrative on pages 71-72:

Samantha: ...that was my first experience coming to the U.S. — being afraid of the little White people I saw there, just missing home horribly.

Me: How has that changed? What do you feel now?

Samantha: I still miss home. I miss home a lot still. Through the years I still felt for the most part I was just here to get my education or whatever; And it wasn't until probably like my last year of um... well last two years of (training) where I really began to sit down and evaluate, you know would it be better to go back home, you know, would I have the same opportunities there as far as (career), being able to make more money back home. I just felt the opportunities would be better here in that regard and that's why I'm here. But I really do miss home.

Me: So you used to White people now?

Samantha: Well, I guess as much as you are. (The women laugh).

Me: Okay, whatever that means (laugh). I think, I think I still have a lot to learn about the culture — American culture. 'Cause there is a White culture I think, and a Black culture and all these others; Hispanic culture and all these different cultures in the States and it's kinda... I mean it takes years to really pick up.

In the preceding narratives and excerpts of dialogue, both women express how their plans changed over the years for different reasons, in regard to their decisions to remain in the U.S. instead of returning to the island. We can see here that the fear they experienced in the initial moments of their arrival in the U.S.

changed in the process of adjustment to their new environment. It is also evidence of a stronger need to feel free to explore career opportunities available in the U.S. and escape the struggle of finding meaningful and well-paying employment back in the Caribbean. This feeling or need to advance themselves or take full advantage of opportunities available to them can sometimes put migrants at risk for representing a threat to others in society – a process very much like what Victor Turner’s social drama theory describes (See Review of Literature). Here is where cultural conflict comes in.

A Cultural Conflict: African Americans, Education and Work

As the interview progressed there seemed to emerge, a discussion of conflicts between African Americans and African Caribbean people in the U.S. The women that talked about these situations again were the ones who had come to the U.S. to live at an early age, not as adults; so they had much more experience in terms of interaction with other members of American society. Upon arrival, both Evelyn and Tamela seemed to have had experiences with the American educational system that affected the way they saw life in the U.S. from then on, as in both their cases they were “put back” one grade level from where they were in their schooling in the Jamaica. Even Ruth digressed at one point and reflected on the fact there seemed to be tension between herself and other African Americans that she schooled with while growing up in Iowa. For all the women though, there was an emphasis on how important education and earning

a good living were in their lives and the apparent conflict between the women as a group and African Americans seemed to persist because of the differences in their views on education and work.

Evelyn: And when I came here I was actually put back in school and put in the eighth grade because it was assumed that I was ignorant or illiterate—I didn't know anything because I was, I don't know... that was assumed I guess. And ahhh, I was put in the eighth grade which was wrong, but I went to that school for a year and it was a very interesting experience, because—actually you know, like people are saying here that they have... actually the Whites treated me better than the Black American students did at school. Which I thought was very, very interesting, that is because I think there's this... it's kind of a game I suppose that Whites like to play in treating Black foreigners as if we're not Black. They classify us as other, this group called other, which is non-existent. You're either Black, you're White or you're Asian. You know, or a combination thereof. But, the Whites treated me differently and they always used to make comments like you know you're different from the Black Americans... and I'm like how am I different—I look like them, so how can you tell that I'm different? You know, like I said—it was a little game that they were playing there. The Black Americans resented that so it was kind of a strange mixture of—I don't know what one would call it but, that was my experience when I was in the 8th grade actually and it carried over into high school because I always remembered that and it was always that little conflict going on. When I got to high school it actually used to be fights between the Jamaican kids and the Black American kids—(they) used to have fist fights at school over stuff that was totally nonsensical; you know, I mean it made absolutely no sense, but they used to bring bats to school and all that kinda nonsense—fight each other.

Evelyn's story reveals an ongoing dialectic tension that is created between her identification as a Black woman versus her perception of Black Americans or how they are perceived in her opinion by White Americans. On the one hand, she seems to feel a connection to Black Americans culturally; this is why she asks the Whites who approach her with the "differences" argument to prove how

they know she is different – “and I’m like how am I different – I look like them, so how can you tell that I’m different?” But on the other hand, her upbringing and early experiences in Jamaica act divisively to set her apart from the group, along with stereotypes of how the group is viewed within American culture itself. This is why she is puzzled by the ongoing tensions between African Americans and African Caribbean people that she witnesses in her adolescence. She says, “it made absolutely no sense.”

As Evelyn introduces what she sees as a problem or continuing conflict to the group, we can see the tension that exists both between Black and White American groups as well as between the diverse Blacks (African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans). It is also important to note how deeply she is aware of the tensions between Blacks and Whites, especially in how Whites have stereotyped American Blacks and then point to her being different as a way to justify and continue their stereotyping; She refers to this act as “a little game they were playing.” She feels caught in the middle, but doesn’t quite have the words to explain it. She says “I don’t know what one would call it...”

The catch phrase, “caught in the middle” goes back to my points in the review of literature and gives a slightly new meaning to Stonquist’s *le déraciné* and confirms Turner’s concept of liminality. Stonequist (1937) notes, the marginal man (*le déraciné*), “is one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic, cultures” (p. xv). *Le*

déraciné gives name to a displaced individual while Turner uses the term “limin” to describe a space in between two places, where “threshold people” or migrants reside. Evelyn’s position is taken a step further with the concept of *le déraciné*, as she is not just caught between Caribbean culture and American culture (two different and antagonistic cultures), but also between White culture and Black culture in the U.S (again, two different and antagonistic cultures).

Next, Tamela tells of a similar experience to Evelyn’s. This part of her narrative started with her explanation of her experience at the airport in Miami when she first arrived in the U.S. She goes on to talk of misconceptions about foreign children in the U.S. educational system and how initially the system seemed to not care about people like her as she was put back in elementary school and her name was misspelled for at least six years before a correction could be made. Again, she too senses the existence of a conflict between herself and American Black youth.

Tamela: And then, when I started elementary school in West Palm Beach they put me back (Evelyn sucks her teeth) one year. It was assumed that you don’t know anything. And so I was put back a year... and then, they realized that they made a mistake – that they should have never... they made a mistake in putting me back. And I went through a whole thing, my name wasn’t spelled correctly, my name was wrong instead of Tamela, my name was Pamela. It was just so, (sighs)... and I couldn’t correct that until I got into high school; that was when it was corrected. And so I went through 4th grade in elementary to 9th grade in high school with Pamela...

When I got to high school I knew that my parents couldn’t afford to send me to college, so I figured out that I could go to college if I graduated

valedictorian of my class, so that was my objective. But I was hated because of that. Because the Blacks... Americans... felt like I was taking something that belonged to them. That you came from a foreign country and you're getting our scholarships... you're getting our monies that belong to us. And that was our thing to struggle with. From my 9th grade to my 12th grade year that was the worst thing—I dealt with that, and I was just like well, you know I really had to get to the point where I just said “look, you have the same opportunity that I have, but I think the fact that we, the fact that I went to school in Jamaica made me realize how much American education is really, really very free; ‘Cause my parents were paying for my books, my uniform, everything in Jamaica... It was the reverse, I almost realize it was the reverse in... versus Jamaica and America because in Jamaica your parents were paying for your education, then when you passed the test, the government paid for it. But here, okay the government paid for it and if you didn't do anything with it, hey that's on you.

Me: And they don't even realize that.

Tamela: They don't realize that!

Ruth: Well, they don't know.

Tamela: They don't know. And that's where I think it comes where the people... the White race in America recognizes that the Blacks that come from other countries do have a different mentality and a different attitude. There is a difference. We have the mentality like look, this is an opportunity, whereas some Black Americans, not all of them, some of them have a mentality that “you owe me something.” And that's the difference, that's why we're so aloof to them and then we have an attitude.

Ruth: We come here to work.

Tamela: Exactly, we're coming from look here; jobs are scarce in our country. If you're... there's no really no class in our country, if you're rich or poor, (no matter) which category do you fall in... I mean we know the realities of life and when we come here we see you guys wasting and just being lazy and slothful and yeah, we're taking some opportunity but you had them offered to you too. And so I've dealt with that.

As Tamela spoke, I could tell most of the women there were in agreement with her observations as I noticed nodding heads, pouting lips and indistinct verbal affirmations around the room. As you can see, both Ruth and I spoke in agreement as well. The general sentiment in the room was that it was a pity how sometimes people can be blind to the elements and opportunities in their own social environment and then at times blame others for seeking and taking advantage of those elements as if somehow, they were being robbed.

Of special note is also how Tamela took the liberty to not only speak for herself at times but to also refer to the group by using the term “we” – “we have the mentality,” “we know the realities of life,” and “we see you guys being lazy and slothful.” This is in part, formal evidence of how she confirms the cultural identity of the women as a group from similar backgrounds.

The conversation continues with Ruth adding her own story.

Ruth: When I was in junior high, well we didn’t have many Black people there. It was me and I went to school in my uniform – my Mom say, “Well, where you’re going?” I said, “I’m going to school” – in my Jamaican uniform... (laughter) like “yeah, I’m going to school.” It’s like hey... I found out differently when I got there. And there was a Black guy there – uglier than sin. (laughter)

Me: The only one right? (I joke)

Ruth: The only one and he wouldn’t talk to me! He would not talk to me. And he hung out with the White kids. So, I said okay, fine. So, I was on my own. So, I understand. And then, when I got in high school and started getting active, I had the Black students that wouldn’t talk to me, you know. But, I was a person that was curious and I wanted to learn about the culture so I signed up for everything.

Tamela: Okay! (In agreement as if she did the same thing)

Ruth: I didn't like sports, so I signed up for the Pep Club—I liked their uniforms! Signed up for the Spanish Club, the Home-Ec. Club, the English Club—didn't have a car, but I signed up for all of 'em, because I was curious and I got active in different things. But, the Black Americans, I would always have a struggle with them, 'til later on, I got in the variety show. But, I was in like the plays in school, I was doing all that kind of stuff and so, there was some tension.

Tamela: It was interesting when I came, because I liked being active. I did it, okay, no big deal. This is the way we make friends. But the Black Americans wouldn't see it that way. They was like you're trying to be White or you're trying to be something better than us or something like that. I was like, I mean look, these are opportunities to go home late (the women laugh).

As we can see both Ruth and Tamela continue to draw on their experiences in the U.S. school systems to confirm a conflict between African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. The question of why the Black American youth seem to perceive the women's behavior and active involvement in school activities as "trying to be White" is definitely the subject of another thesis altogether.

However, a possible explanation for some of the perceived tension between the two groups could be that the Afro-Caribbean worldview is larger in capacity as opposed to the American worldview in general. Wood (1997) maintains that marginalized stand-points have the greatest potential to provide insight into how societies operate in ways that maintain power structures that affect social groups differently. Coming from what are normally considered poverty-stricken, Third World countries creates a particular stand-point that allows the women to see

themselves in relation to the rest of the world itself. In particular, it gives them a view of their own nations as well as a view of First World countries or nations that exhibit power and authority over them and the rest of the world. The women seem to see themselves as Black not only in the sense that they are Blacks from the Caribbean, but also in the sense that their Blackness represents Black people all over the world. In contrast, Blackness in the U.S. is viewed as more of a political stand-point in opposition to Whiteness in American society – a smaller context – something that takes some getting used to for even the most well-traveled and informed Black foreigner. In addition to that, the women see their migration and behavior within their new environment as normal and do not have a reference base for the meanings of what Black Americans seem to label “acting White” or “acting Black.” It is possible that the multicultural nature of most Caribbean societies as well as the nature of our experience with British colonialism contributes to our perceptions of normal behavior and overall worldview. This debate itself brings us to questions of identity, which are discussed by the next theme that emerged from the women’s conversations.

Discrimination and Identity Issues: Blackness or Nationalism?

This theme that emerged from the conversations during the group interview confirmed that racial tensions within the social atmosphere of the United States, trigger and impact identity negotiations in the lives of Afro-Caribbean women who have migrated here. It is evidence that both Hedge

(1998) and Schiller (1999), both discussed in Chapter Two, are accurate in their assertions:

For ethnic women, achieving a personal coherence of self is a struggle in the face of negotiating experiences of marginalization and displacement. Asserting identity becomes an act of negotiation between private and public, of fragmentation and coherence, of past and present, and of self and other. (Hedge, 1998, p. 37)

To be Black in the United States without an ethnic label is to be a person without a history or country. Haitians and other Black immigrants from the Caribbean struggle to define themselves publicly in terms other than Blackness. Haitians speak of not wanting to be 'Black twice'. To be Black once is to be Haitian... But to be Black twice is to accept the designation of Black within the United States - that is, to take on the identity of African American, which is to say not fully American. (Schiller, 1999, p. 29)

At this point in the group interview, I asked the women to explain the kinds of experiences they'd had while living in the U.S., in which they were able to confirm that there was some truth in perceptions that claim the existence of racism or discrimination in American society. That discussion itself evolved into an open dialogue about cultural identity and whether one would be preferred to be identified as "Black" or for one's nationality, which in both cases sparked feelings of cultural belonging. It proved without a doubt that the concept of discrimination triggered identity negotiation in the women and created a dialectic between being described by outsiders as African American or holding on to their Caribbean identity while desiring to be identified as such.

Tamela begins by talking about the first instance in elementary school when she realized she was different and would be treated as such by Americans

in general. She explains how she discovered what prejudice looked like and how it can exist within all races. What seems like a simple misunderstanding in an elementary classroom, she interprets as having much more meaning:

Tamela: One of the things that really stuck out was when I was in 4th grade and in Jamaica we call things differently. And I remember I dropped a Math book in my class and I said um... I told the teacher, I said – this young girl had thrown my Math book on the floor and I said to the teacher, “she threw my Math book on de ground”; And the girl behind me said “Well you don’t even know what it is, it’s not the ground it’s the floor.” And I was like... I wanted to punch her. And then the teacher didn’t do anything about it and I was the one that got in trouble. So then I realized that there’s even division amongst the Blacks as well as amongst the Whites. And I learned that in 4th grade so that carried me through pretty much, through the rest of my career. But, now I’m learning that there are prejudiced and racist Blacks as well as Whites. So, I’m learning that now, here in Iowa; Iowa has afforded me that... to learn that there are prejudiced and racist Blacks as well as Whites. And so, in any race there’s prejudice.

It is important to note how when learning about a new culture, a person may tend to project meanings that although possibly unintended by the other parties in the interaction, may result in understandings by which all further interactions are judged. These understandings are often confirmed by media and elders in the community and therefore become more ingrained within the mind of the newcomer as indeed “true.”

As the interview progressed, I posed the same question to Evelyn directly. She responded by recounting an experience in which she and another Black friend of hers, were attempting to move into an apartment that had advertised a need for roommates.

Me: What about you Evelyn; do you remember anything that happened to you that made you realize it was such a big problem?

Evelyn: Well, actually there was a time when I was a teenager and I wanted to move out of my Mom's house... Ha! (sarcastically). So a girlfriend and I were gonna get an apartment together. And this girl wanted a roommate and they had some roommates listed or ads for roommates listed in the paper. So we did this to answer one of the ads. And well these White ladies were living there together, they're like well you know, "I have to ask the manager's permission if you guys can move in here because you're Black." I'm thinking...

Me: What? (as if in shock myself)

Evelyn: Yeah, this is what she told me.

Me: This is in Chicago?

Evelyn: In (another part of) Illinois. I remember this.

Ruth: What year?

Evelyn: I think I was about, maybe 16 or so. The people there, well you had a lot of very wealthy people all living there... So, I thought that they're just very prejudiced... But that was like one of my, I guess what you would call one of my shocking experiences.

Me: So what happened? Did she... did you guys get in?

Evelyn: No.

Me: So you just didn't bother?

Evelyn: No. I mean... I didn't want to move in there that bad. But now, if it was now when I look back, I really would have put up a big stink and probably filed a lawsuit and all that (laughs). You know, in hindsight.

As we observe the progression of the conversation, we can see that by the end,

Evelyn confirms a growth process in her perception of the situation. It is a

similar growth to Tamela's 4th Grade identification with the existence of discrimination and prejudice in the U.S., as both women use what seem to be rather minute instances in comparison to African Americans talk of more direct discrimination like being denied a job or being called the "N"-word, to categorize the experience and find its significance.

Ruth has a funnier story of her first experience of recognizing prejudice; She calls it "that racism thing":

Ruth: But you know what though, I was thinking 'bout what she said... I remember when I went to school in Mason City; I spent the summer in Charles City and then I moved back to Mason City and went to school there. And of course, it was culture shock, everything shock, I mean I had to be there fifteen-twenty minutes before school started. I'll take all those clothes off in the winter time because I was so cold; and I walked to school. But I remember, the first time that I ran across that racism thing, but I didn't understand it. I was walking home and this l'il White guy said to me "Hi, Blackie." And I said, "Hi, Whitie..." (The room is roaring with laughter). I kid you not... I didn't know what that meant...

"I didn't know what that meant" is key here. At such a young age, Ruth didn't have a name for her experience. Whether the young boy meant "Blackie" in a negative or racist way we will never know for sure, but Ruth, through recounting the experience when asked about racist situations, gives it a name. It is possible that her doing so was affected by the other women who had recounted experiences with prejudice; She might have been attempting to secure identification with the group. However, it is also possible that this was her true

understanding of the situation, which she had learned possibly through her own human development, through the media or other communication channels.

The real point in our conversations that caused the discussion to move from discrimination to identity occurred as a result of an interjection by Krissy, 20, of Jamaica. She made her comments in reference to what Ruth and Tamela said on page 75 about discovering a conflict between African Americans and themselves. But, it is important to note that immediately prior to that, Evelyn, Ruth and Tamela had just described their first experiences with racism. Ruth continued to make statements about being involved in a number of activities in high school and recognizing that Black American students could not seem to identify with her behavior. Tamela empathized with her situation by recounting her own experience in high school. She explains how African American students took her being active in a number of school activities as "trying to be White." In defense, she claims her behavior was simply the result of an effort to make friends in a new environment and an opportunity "to go home late." Similarly, Krissy empathizes with Tamela, but takes us in somewhat of a different direction:

Tamela: It was interesting when I came, because I liked being active. I did it, okay, no big deal. This is the way we make friends. But the Black Americans wouldn't see it that way. They was like you're trying to be White or you're trying to be something better than us or something like that. I was like, I mean look, these are opportunities to go home late (laughter).

Krissy: I'm on your side. But one thing I just don't understand... One time I got in a fight with like this girl from the track team and she kept saying like "well, I'm from Memphis... I'm from Memphis." I'm like, "Soooo?" She's like "Yeah, I'll *#@\$% you up or something like that." I'm like "okay." I mean it's like okay I'm from Memphis, like what does that mean, like what is that supposed to mean exactly? Like it's some ghetto town or something – they're like so proud to be like from the ghetto. I just can't understand that!

Me: You know what, well you've seen the poverty in Jamaica...

Krissy: Yeah!

Me: ...And so, for them to be saying I'm proud of...

Krissy: Yeah... to be from the ghetto... Well, they're like yeah I'm from the ghetto and I'm like you should never ever tell someone that you are like, "ghetto"; that like wrong. That's like putting yourself down. And then they're like hate the White people because they say they're ghetto. And I'm like, well you said you were ghetto and you're proud of it. So, if I hear you saying you're ghetto, chances are I'm gonna call you ghetto.

Tamela: And you know that's the problem... that's one thing with the word "nigger." I tell people, Black people; I say "look, if you don't want to be called "nigger" then don't have another Black person call you "nigger," because then you're trying on the White people what they've been trying to put on you for so long – prejudice and racism. So, they were like, "well, you just don't understand – it's not 'nigger,' it's 'my nigger'." I'm like well, it's spelled the same way – means the same thing. So, don't call me a "nigger" 'cause I'm not a "nigger"!

Krissy: That was like a word coined by some White folk. I mean they don't like White people again... then they're like, yeah I'll call myself a "nigger" just because – all the rappers do it so it's cool. I don't think it's cool... I don't want anybody calling me a "nigger." I know I'm Black yes, but hey...

Tamela: I'm Black... not anything else. I'm not African American – I'm Black. That way when you get on the phone and you... I sound like I might be... I'm a professional so I sound like a professional, but when you ask me what I am, "I'm Black," that way there's no misconceptions.

'Cause I think when you say you're African American, it kinda gives them in their mind a connotation of what they wanna think. But when you say you're Black—they know what to expect... I'm coming, I'm Black (laughs).

As we observe the way this conversation progressed, it is possible to see how it evolved from ideas related to racism, to identity issues. Krissy's comments about a situational conflict in college indicate her confusion and lack of identification with some parts of African American culture. The young woman she was having a verbal spat with, might have just been saying "I'm from Memphis" to say, 'this is my hometown, so I have a home field advantage.' She was probably referring more to what *could* happen if she and Krissy were to pursue a physical rather than verbal fight; meaning that the physical fight itself could turn into a bitter rivalry between not just the young women as individuals, but rather the groups or families with which either identified. In her own way, the other young woman was marking her territory. Krissy might have understood what she meant to say, but was more disgruntled by her identification with an area that Krissy herself recognized as a poverty-stricken community — "the ghetto." I felt like I understood exactly her point of view and she confirmed this through the conversation.

Tamela on the other hand, took Krissy's discussion of labeling oneself as being from the ghetto, but then hating when outsiders call you "ghetto," and applied it to the concept of the use of the term "nigger." Because Tamela

objected to the use of the term in any sense and regarded it as being equated with or making reference to African Americans, she expressed a desire to separate herself from African Americans altogether – “I’m Black... not anything else. I’m not African American – I’m Black.” Here is where the discussion of identity began.

The women then, attempt to choose between identifying as “Black” in a particular sense, identifying as “African American” and identifying as “Jamaican” or “Bahamian” in terms of nationality. Krissy went on:

Krissy: Somebody asked me, this guy one time said, “What do you call yourselves? Do you consider yourself to be Jamaican, Black or African American? So I’m like, we’re definitely not African American (a few of the women laugh). I would say we’re Jamaican. “So you don’t like being called Black?” (he asks us). So, I’m like, “We *are* Black, but we’re Jamaicans.” So he’s like, “Well, how can you be Black and Jamaican at the same time?”

Evelyn: ‘Cause most Jamaicans are Black.

Krissy: Exactly! They think that Black is just something... that’s Americanized...

Evelyn: Yeah, in the United States... yeah, that’s very true. That’s like a big problem as far as numbers are concerned because it will always keep Black Americans perceiving themselves as being in the minority; while if they look at the big picture and think of themselves as just being Black... there are so many Black people in the world... There are so many of us. But they don’t look at it that way and that can keep you thinking that you are a minority and when people call you a minority, which is a word that I absolutely despise, because I don’t think of myself as a minority – As a woman I’m not a minority, as a Black person I’m not a minority – so therefore I’m not a minority. So, you know if they have that mentality and people are always able to put them in that category, which I just despise, I hate that word ‘minority’... yuck!

The question posed to Krissy by the young, White man illustrates the level of ignorance that some foreigners have to cope with when encountering what Americans know of their distinctive cultures. In American culture “Black” is seen as one-dimensional and is defined in opposition to “White.” This is possibly the reason for the young man’s confusion, because he sees Krissy’s being Jamaican as outside of that dialectic. Evelyn indicates that it is not—“Most Jamaicans *are* Black,” but don’t want to be considered “Black” in terms of African American because along with carrying negative connotations, it denies them their separate heritage, which they take much pride in. Again, Evelyn points to seeing a connection between all Black peoples of the world rather than limiting her definition of “Black” to the United States.

Ruth interjects upon hearing Krissy and Evelyn’s argument, to pose the identity question to all of us. Once she hears a couple of our responses, she goes on to tell a narrative that describes her feelings on the subject of identity. In a way, she feels identity is ambiguous and doesn’t seem to pay much attention personally, to the way in which she is identified by others. Later she confirms her preference for the term “Black” and tells why.

Ruth: So what do you guys call yourselves?

Me: I’m Bahamian.

Evelyn: I’m just Black.

Ruth: I remember when I was working, there was one time when the company didn't have their... didn't meet their quota, you know of course I was like 'whatever'. So, my boss called me in and said they have to change me to Hispanic because um... (laughter) (Krissy: 'cause of the Caribbean), the Caribbean 'n stuff you know. And I'm like well...

Me: But the Caribbean is not Hispanic. If you're talking 'bout Central America...

Evelyn: Well some parts of the Caribbean were colonized by the Spanish...

Ruth: Yeah there was... but you know I didn't care. I was like "ohhhh, okay" – I said, fine. So, she changed it girl and I went back out on the floor and I told somebody I said, "Oh, yeah they got me down as Hispanic or something now." And the Black girls got so mad and I was like "what's your problem." I mean I couldn't care less what they called me. I'm like, "whatever works!" and keep going (laughter). It was so funny. But I mean you know, that's because I really didn't... back then you know, coming here as a kid and you never talked about race... (the women are still laughing) And for me it wasn't you know... and then my mother came here and married this White guy, so my middle sister is mixed and so you know – even like my husband's mother is White. I mean, you know our family is so... a little bit of everything. So, I would like to be called Jamaican American, but you know, I come here and I'm automatic American citizen now, so, I go by African American. But, I also like being... just being Black – forget the rest of it. I like Black; I like that word better than any other one that I've had. I keep saying, why don't they make up their mind – first we're negroes and then colored and then this and then that; every five or ten years it's a different name. And so to me it's confusing and I'm thinking they need to get a grip – get a name and stick with it.

Ruth's comments as the oldest member of the group become very important as her voice stands out as a voice of wisdom to all of the women who were there that night. What she sums up in the preceding narrative indicates the depth and complexity of cultural identity issues for Afro-Caribbean women who

have migrated to the U.S. Our struggle to find a safe space where we can just be ourselves, is addressed through Ruth's and the other women's stories that you have just read and it is that subject in particular that I also addressed in the staged performance of the women's personal narratives.

Individual Interviews: The Scripting Process

The scripting process actually played a major role in the interpretation of the data. The process itself involved strategic analysis of the narratives and forced me as a writer to arrange them into themes that I could present to an audience in a creative way. I entitled the staged performance of the women's narratives, "SAFE PASSAGE: A Performance of Migration and Explorations of Race and Culture."

"Safe Passage" meant everything to me – the words described my interpretation of migration as a cultural performance. I believed after talking to my informants and reflecting on my own experiences that our transition to life in the U.S. was not the same as that of other immigrants from other cultures. For some reason, the personal became political as our racial identities and cultural backgrounds, seemed to play a large role in our adjustment experiences. So I could not name the show "Passage" alone to reflect that it was a show about migration, but I wanted to make a political statement and emphasize that it was "Safe Passage" that was necessary to effect a change in American society's way of viewing race as a defining feature in everyday life.

I wanted to tell the world about Afro-Caribbean women – I wanted to tell people about me, my experience and the experiences of the women I talked to. I wanted to present them as multi-dimensional characters that represented or symbolized something about us as a group that was distinctive. And utilizing my theatre background, I also wanted it to be entertaining.

What the scripting process essentially helped me to do was analyze the narratives for public consumption, which in turn contributed to locating answers to the research questions posed in the study. This coding of the data, is an integral part of the process of qualitative research.

What emerged are what I consider sub-themes that connect to and enhance thematic areas found in the group interview:

1. Growing up on the island – Margaret's story.
2. Defining moments where race became important – Samantha's story as well as my own.
3. Identity: Us, Them, and Language, was the sub-theme under which I included Valerie's story of struggle with identity.

As each character was portrayed, their stories were all told in relation to their migration experiences and the changes they would have to go through upon moving from one society to the next. What follows are excerpts from the script's text, which are essentially the narratives of some of the women I talked to

in my research. They will show the progress that was made toward thematic analysis.

Growing up on the Island

Margaret, 25, of Trinidad shared what her experience was like growing up on that island. In addition she also points to why it is necessary for people to migrate and how that experience and the values that were important there, were not the same in the context of the U.S. social dynamic. Her story is indicative of the role social construction plays in the lives of those of us who migrate either as children or adults. She expresses a transition in her perception of the U.S. from before her arrival to once she'd lived her for some time. Her story therefore enhances the theme, *From First to Lasting Impressions*. I used her narrative voice to play the Trinidadian woman in the show.

Margaret: Growing up in Trinidad the thing that stressed you most of all is "get your paper" - education. But besides dat it was fun. It was more an idealic kinda life, you know, it was more outdoor play and you know, no care in de world. And I remember summers, it was all about playin' outside, cricket or school or teach or you know, climbin' trees, pickin' fruits. You know back home dey always say if you go to America and you study hard and you get your papers den you can make more money and make tings better because you see, the thing is you can become educated but in Trinidad it doesn't necessarily become equated to living a better lifestyle or getting a better job. It doesn't always pay off in de end. So you could still end up in a poverty cycle back home. Whereas here you know, you get an education - you have a chance of movin' forward. Growing up too, you know dey say life is so much better in America bein' that this so easy and that is so easy and you can just do - you know, but really life is not easy in America. Its not any better.

I guess too it's a lot of de TV influence - everything looks so much better - everything looks so much easier - everything looks so idealic that people say you know, when you go to America you could learn anything you want to do or you could do anything you want to do; And it's **not** like dat. Not all handed to you on a silver platter. But most people don't know that. And we have this concept that everybody in America is rich. And I guess that's what I grew up with too and that's what I thought too. Until you're faced with the reality and it's not like dat. Americans work 4 times as hard and have 10 times less fun and dats why dey make so much more money. To me, in Trinidad - I mean even de people in de bank dey work overtime sometimes but it's not overtime like how people work here. The whole life around here is centered around making money. So that's why they make money; And that's why it remains wealthy. Here you make money to make more, to make more, to make more, to make more. Back home you wanta make money so you have just enough to have a good life. We kinda want to hold on to our values... here it's like... here you know, you do what you gotta do to make the money... Anything goes, I guess.

In this narrative, Margaret uses the memory of her life experience growing up in Trinidad and logical reasoning to explain both the role and the impact migration has on migrants like herself. What she expresses constructs a picture of Trinidad as a happy place, a comfortable place, but also a place where issues of poverty are central and a place where it is hard to earn a good living. Margaret also mentioned to me during one of our interviews that she and some of her friends, once they had graduated from high school would go to the library to investigate what colleges in the U.S. it would be most feasible for them to apply to. She describes the importance of education to Trinidadians just as the other women do in the group interview. What is especially important is that she verbalizes the feelings of being "stuck" when she reveals the difference between

the benefits of a good education at home versus its potential in the U.S. – “you could still end up in a poverty cycle back home,” she says, even with an education. This is then the impetus for migration, which creates a dialectical tension between remaining on the island and migrating to the U.S. As she reminisces on her life growing up, she describes it as being ideal. On the other hand migrating is described initially as a saving grace, and then as a harsh reality as she senses the disparity in the two countries’ value systems especially in regards to monetary gain. It seems, looking back she finds some value in being less than wealthy.

Defining Moments Where Race Became Important

Just as was revealed in the group interviews, racism and discrimination were important factors in the social adjustment of some of the women. In the play, I used the experience of the woman from The Bahamas to inform the audience of this fact. Sam tells a story of one of the first times in her life that she began to understand that to some people “being Black” was not such a good thing. The excerpt of the interview scene that follows occurred in the production of “Safe Passage” and resembles the actual interview that took place during one of our first meetings in a restaurant. It is exactly the way she told the story.

Interviewer: So anyway, tell me have you had any experiences where you felt you were discriminated against on the basis of your skin color?

SAM: ...I never really came face-to-face with it until I had a running-in with one of my professors, who I ended up... you know it became a big

thing and I end up havin' to write him up and whatever. There was this big meeting about it... I don't remember exactly what he said, but he threw a racial slur at me in class, in front of the whole class and I was sittin' in front of the class... And then...

Interviewer: You can't remember exactly what he said?

SAM: Mm-mmm (Shakes her head).

Interviewer: I mean was it the N-word, was it the C-word? What was it like?

SAM: No, no no... He said... he asked me a question and you know, I tried to answer it the best way I could... And then, you know he said something... "Oh that's because you're Black" or something like that... and you know, I was so offended, I got up in the middle of class - went to the bathroom crying or whatever have you and I didn't go back to class that day. And then I waited you know, after class for my friend, who is White, to come out and I said to her Kathy, I'm gonna report this, you know I'm gonna report this to Black Student Affairs, I'm going to the Dean of International Students and let her know. Will you be willing to speak up for me in terms of...

(Waitress brings out food)

Waitress: Here you go... will that be all?

Interviewer: Yes, thank you we're fine now... (Continues conversation)
Like a witness to what happened?

SAM: Yeah...what he said. And basically, she didn't you know... It was like "oh, you know, I don't know if I heard him well" and that type of thing.

Interviewer: And this was your best friend?

SAM: Yup...this was my best friend. And then, you know, one of the other girls who I was also close with, I asked her the same thing like a day later and it was basically, "oh, you know SAM, you know just forget about it, you know don't... you know he's just a dick, don't press it... You know basically they didn't want to get involved even though they were there and

witnessed, you know the whole thing and what he said, then how the whole class went tense when he said it... So I took it up to the Dean and everything and then the head of the Religious Studies Department got involved because it was... it was ahhh... what class was it? Catholicism Today or something like that and then he was a priest... That was the thing about it that hurt me so bad, you know, he was a man of the cloth... And so I went to him after class and I said to him, Father so-and-so, I really took hombrage to what you said, you know and that was a really cruel comment... And basicly this man blew up in my face... he blew up in my face, started shoutin'. I mean and the thing is when I came in he tole me close the door behind me... And then he exploded, "Look at you, look at you... every l'il thing that people say it's gonna... is gonna cut into your spine... So! Every l'il thing that people say is gonna cut into your soul!? You know, look at you, standin' there like a big baby." I'm telling you and the secretary of the Religious Studies Department heard that... his office was like four doors down... She heard it... she overheard the whole conversation... So she was able to verify that he was screamin' and carryin' on inappropriately and that she saw me lef' in tears. So that was my first encounter with racism in the U.S.

What Samantha describes in this interview is her first encounter with someone, namely a college professor and a priest, who believed all Blacks in American society are backward and do not possess the same potential for intelligence as other ethnic groups. It is indeed an opposite experience from the more nurturing yet academically rigorous atmosphere in the educational system in The Bahamas, with which Samantha has first-hand knowledge. It is no wonder that his response in the classroom shocked her. But besides that fact, she goes on to see how when she expresses a desire to report the priest's actions as discrimination to the college's administration, she receives no support from her closest White friends. The two women she approaches to act as witnesses to what occurred, did not seem to want to play any part in her decision to file a complaint. This is

evidence of why discrimination as a problem in the U.S. experiences little effective change. Nevertheless, Sam had the courage to report the situation on her own.

My own analysis of the impact race has on Afro-Caribbean women was also shared through a monologue in the script. It is an example of the role autoethnography played as a part of the scripting process. In this piece, I shared with the audience my own experience of what I found to be a new definition of racism – one that I hadn't considered in hearing stories about America's history with slavery and lynchings and mass crusades against Blacks. My own confrontations in the academy, similar to Samantha's experience, led to my understanding of the existence of institutional racism and what I saw as the deeper reasons why it continues to be a problem in the U.S. My interpretations at the time I wrote the monologue were also triggered by my talks with the women in the study. It was an emotional piece and each of the three nights that I performed it I could feel myself trembling, and tried hard to play it as if it were another character outside myself, in order to maintain my emotional stability on stage:

You know I used to think racism was this thing - this ugly thing that existed only in some rare form on the boundaries of wherever I walked.

Hey, you know I wasn't born in America.

In the Caribbean we have this class thing you know... It's all about money and if your family owns anything or can send their children to private v.

public schools. Hell, race didn't have much to do about nothing... About 80 - 85% of everybody looks like me anyway, besides the tourists that come for a good time and leave.

But I came to America via the South... And Blacks down there were raving lunatics in my opinion.

There was all this talk of where they had been - the past - slavery - shoot, I knew all about the past... I studied history (my own and American).

But everyday in college - my freshman year I went to these seminars that were required for freshman, where I learned about our school's founder Mary McLeod-Bethune who started out with 3 little girls, \$1.50, and faith in God. But I kept hearing the story - over and over and over again - every seminar, every assembly, every special event. And I heard stories about racism. How for years Blacks have been struggling for **survival, safety, inclusion**. How they were denied their history - knowledge of their roots - their very identities were lost.

So, I said hey - what's with all this hullabaloo - what's the deal with all the complaining - everything is Black-White, Black-White, Black-White. It never really made any sense to me. Just pick up your Negro selves and start walking. Okay slavery happened - people hate you - there's discrimination - so, make a way! That's what my mum used to say all the time - make a way.

(Moves to sit in chair)

I didn't understand what all the talk was about... until I saw for myself.

Until a White woman picked herself up and walked out of a scheduled interview with me in San Francisco, CA - I hadn't understood - The same woman who courted me via telephone interviews for 3 months prior - approved the purchase of a \$1,500 airline ticket for me to fly up to San Francisco last minute, and put me up in a business suite at the Holiday Inn - And suddenly as I walked through her office door, she had to beat the traffic.

I didn't understand – until I witnessed myself as the brunt of White jokes about how I looked ethnic to the core when I walked into a class with what my assailant called a Mary J. Blige look.

I didn't understand until I saw a White man lust at my body and ask me, "What type of food y'all eat down there?"

I didn't understand until I saw colleagues try to make a political puppet out of me and pretend to be my friends so that they can make themselves feel... seem more open to diversity.

I didn't understand until I felt all eyes on me, when I was the only Black person in the room – my ears ringing from all the internal conversations I could hear where people were calling my name.

I didn't understand until I witnessed a strange kind of anger in people's eyes sometimes when I was about to speak – anger or feelings that I thought were unfounded... I felt misunderstood.

Now I understand that what keeps the idea of racism alive isn't just White men in sheets with torches... It's also White little girls afraid to learn about a people their parents told them bad things about.

It's also, White women who take a stand as feminists but don't like to touch Black issues or only scratch the surface of them when they do.

It's also, White men who approach and offer me money – thinking that every Black, exotic, woman's body can be bought – sometimes for free.

And you know what – it's Blacks' fears too. In their ambitions for **survival, safety, inclusion** – they accept sometimes the worst of the system without question... And whenever they do fight, that's what gets shown on TV – and so it seems like you always see them fighting.

Oh... and don't get me wrong – they hate too, with a passion. They hate because they are afraid – they've been burnt.

Racism exists because people don't know how to face or relate to difference – And when people don't know what else to do, a kind of tribalism takes over... And yes, Black and White tribalism are very real.

It took me seven years to understand these things – the things that help keep the idea of racism alive – because I have the privilege of being a watcher, an outsider, as well as having the not so privileged position of being an insider, even when I claim I am not, nor do I want to be.

I know things between Blacks and Whites in the U.S. are improving somewhat, but I just wanted to tell you the story of my awakening to these truths.

I've never seen a Black man hanging from a tree.

I've never seen a real KKK member – knowing that he or she was a real KKK member.

Those things are what I used to think racism looked like...

I was right in the beginning... racism is an ugly thing, a very deceptive thing... but I was also wrong, it doesn't just exist in some rare form on the boundaries of wherever I walk.

In this monologue I attempt to provide the audience with examples of why and how my belief in the existence and definition of racism evolved through my experiences with its institutional forms. I provide a glimpse of my journey from my initial arrival in Florida and how I interpreted American racial tensions, to my transit to Iowa where the social and political atmosphere was very different. My experience of being flown to San Francisco, California for a job interview, to witness the very woman who made the decision turn away at the sight of me was very traumatic. Over and over again I analyzed that situation in my mind and could come up with no other reason than prejudice for her sudden excuse not to interview me. Of course, I could be wrong. But in addition to this

experience, I find institutional racism ever present in academia and was troubled by people's (students and instructors included) reactions to my presence.

The terms "survival," "safety," and "inclusion" were important in the narrative as I thought they made a profound statement regarding what I feel are the goals of a spiritual search by Blacks in American society. I also use the terms in Chapter Five to conclude with the possibility that these may be the goals of all Black peoples, regardless of nationality. In addition to those terms, the word "idea" is underlined in the monologue when referring to racism because I understood that my use of the term as an outsider in American society, still had the potential to be flawed. So the text is based on my own perception of what I thought occurred in each situation that I draw on throughout the narrative. Perhaps, my reactions were also triggered by culture shock.

Identity: Media and Language

In the next excerpt from the script's text, I utilize Valerie's analysis of her own experience in migrating to the U.S. to show the role that media and language play in how we see ourselves as well as how others see us in terms of identity. Valerie addresses the issue of stereotyping in her narrative, but makes a claim that she has not really had to confront racism or discrimination in the U.S. She links confronting stereotypes to media usage and the ways in which people use media like television for their information about other ethnic groups. She

goes so far as to characterize negative language such as racial slurs as “just rudeness” – something that simply symbolized bad upbringing or impoliteness:

Valerie: You know, I’m not sure I ever thought about what it means to be Jamaican – I just never thought about it that way because, I mean your identity is normally... growing up in Jamaica its normally your family identity. I mean, you don’t have to think about yourself in terms of Jamaican or not Jamaican until you’re outside of it. So, I guess I don’t know, I don’t really know... I’m not sure I’m necessarily a typical Jamaican; I don’t think there’s a typical. So, it’s hard to say you’re a Jamaican because you do this or that...

I have had a few people come to me and say, “well you don’t sound like a normal Jamaican.” And I’m thinking, well what does a normal Jamaican sound like. I think they’ve heard too much of Ms. Cleo... “CALL ME NOW FOR YOUR FREE READING!” (laughs). I think she really goes out of her way to make it believable (laughs). Its kind of a fake kind of dialect that she really tries to emphasize. But sometimes that’s their exposure so they think everybody must talk like that. I just know that I grew up speaking the Queen’s English.

Now Cool Runnings – that would be a true depiction of how different people speak, because they have a character who would always speak the Queen’s English. And that’s how you grow up – you grow up hearing everything. When you tune to de radio or readers, you hope that they’ll... As a matter of fact we used to hate if anybody would be reading the news and trying to do it in any dialect... In America, people just have stereotypes of the way they think we are supposed to talk. I don’t think it has anything to do with racism or them discriminating – It’s just the way people think.

I don’t think I ever really experienced racism except for if you want to count the time I think when me and my husband had just moved into our apartment in Cedar Falls and I think somebody had written the N-word in the snow on our car. The manager told us that it happened... I guess the neighbors saw it, but we never really saw it because by the time we came out the next morning the snow on the car was kind of melted already, so you could only see the beginning of the word, not the whole thing. But I just think that when people do or say things like that they’re just being rude. It’s just a lack of manners. I guess I don’t really think of it that

way... It's just rudeness to me. Sometimes I think we just speak different languages.

At the beginning of her narrative, Valerie notes how easy it is for one to define their self at home, as you are recognized in a small community by your family name. It is only when entering a different social environment that one must confront one's "otherness." Her own analysis confirms what Tajfel (1978) asserts in Chapter Two; identity is a term most often invoked by those who struggle to create meaning and purpose when culturally significant, ideologically powerful social category systems clash with personal and collective group member experiences. However, Valerie still finds it hard to say why and how it is that she can call herself a Jamaican.

In commenting on how the media functions to affect stereotypes of Caribbean people, Valerie uses the character of Ms. Cleo, a woman who presents herself as a psychic on American television infomercials, to illustrate a misconception that exists in how Jamaicans and other Caribbean natives are perceived. She also compares the use of language by characters in the film "Cool Runnings" to ways in which language is used in actuality in Jamaican society, noting that the film is truly representative of the variety of the ways different people speak. Language is indeed a social marker for identity and Valerie's analysis of the media's portrayal of a specific Caribbean dialect illustrates how

images of Caribbean people seen on television and in films can affect everyday interaction and what is expected as “normal” behavior in social settings.

Her analysis of what she labels as an experience with racism (the writing of the “N”-word in the snow on her car) also uses language as a vehicle of coping as she chooses to disregard her experience as significant or regards it as one that has no merit. Her words, “when people do or say things like that they’re just being rude; It’s just a lack of manners...” indicate a redefining of the situation itself for her own psychological comfort. It is evidence of the way in which language can be used to manage what can be perceived as traumatic experiences relative to identity negotiation. It is in essence, a method of survival.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided the narratives of some of the women who participated in this study, described important interactions and the result of the group interview as well as showed how I used individual interviews in the scripting process to make progress toward discovering themes within individual texts. In explicating the major themes of *From First to Lasting Impressions; A Cultural Conflict: African Americans, Education & Work; Discrimination and Identity Issues: Blackness or Nationalism* — I have found that Afro-Caribbean women from Jamaica, The Bahamas and Trinidad, indeed experience a complex struggle with identity and adjustment in the process of migration from the Caribbean region to the United States. I have also found that these experiences that the women

recount are impacted by what is perceived as their racial identities or referent group orientation, based largely on their outward appearances. It is also clear that dialectic tensions exist both in their struggle to identify with the communities they left behind as well as in their attempt to identify with American society, which simultaneously have an effect on the women's emotions and experiences.

The next chapter presents the conclusion of the study, discussing the major findings, the use of personal narratives in ethnographic studies, as well as future implications.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

*Women must write through their bodies, they must invent
the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes,
and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through,
get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that
laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence,"
the one that, aiming for the "impossible"
stops short before the word "impossible"
and writes it as "the end"*

HELENE CIXOUS

Ruth, the eldest out of all of us said to me, "I'll tell you what, I will not trade my Jamaican heritage – because it's made me who I am now."

Ruth: (As Black women from the Caribbean) I think we do have a lot in common and I think we're misunderstood a lot. I think for us even more than (U.S.) Black women – I think men see us as being arrogant...

Evelyn: Arrogance is a good thing. (Laughter)

Ruth: But I think our culture is that... I think we come from cultures where I think we're proud people. I don't know... I mean, my mother is one of those people who just says what she thinks and so we all got that from her. So, I say what I think and if there's something I want to do I go do it, somewhere I want to go and I go.... Even in school, we know that we are supposed to go to school and we know that we're supposed to perform well in school. There is a certain expectation, but it wasn't spoken. You just know you had to do it and you know that you need to carry yourself well and you know you weren't supposed to go out and talk about your business in the street... Well... it's hard though. It's hard.

Such a statement defines the sum of what I have gathered, in terms of the sentiment that the women in this study expressed. For me, it has been a wonderful journey – one that is marked by the discovery that there are others who have come before me and with me, and yet others who will trace even my

footsteps to discover the strong will and determination it takes to face change and meet the challenges of existing in a foreign environment. While I came to Iowa in a daze of ignorance and I struggled to confront my self as other for the first time – I now know that I am not alone and that I have much to be proud of and thankful for. Afro-Caribbean women share a boldness and a bravery that is both remarkable and unmistakable. They seem to have little interest in becoming American, that is, in achieving an American sense of self. Rather, they are more interested in just being their subjective selves and in using agency to theorize themselves. They associate more with a reference group orientation that is Caribbean rather than African American, yet they want to be accepted on their own terms and not stereotyped or misconceived. In all of their decisions to migrate to the U.S., I find that it is more *need* that surfaces as a motivation rather than mere *desire* to be somewhere other than home. If these women had a choice, in most cases they would be where they were first born. But, despite an attachment and identification with their homeland, the flow of immigrants continues to grow as Black women in particular, seek freedoms and opportunities for social mobility in foreign countries, that cannot be found or are less available at home.

However, there is no single and accurate interpretation of the data and every Afro-Caribbean woman that one meets may not represent the characteristics found in the women of this particular study. In addition, looking

at these women from a collective standpoint and focusing on our stories as a group from similar backgrounds does run the risk of obscuring diversity within the cultural group itself. It is easy to group all the women of my study as African Caribbean women, but does that grouping take away from the member's individual differences? The answer is no.

The concept of social groups is useful both in a rational as well as in a political sense. How can we affect social change if we looked at each person in society as a complete individual, not affected by membership in any kind of group? Social change is needed for greater overall equality in society and according to Wood (1997), emphasizing various social groups within a culture promotes awareness of multiple bases of identity and in no way limits our ability to recognize diversity within the group itself.

More importantly, this kind of research does three things. First, it centers Afro-Caribbean women as a cultural group and allows their narratives to be revealed and open for discussion – giving voice to a non-mainstream cultural group, or as Conquergood (1985) describes it – it attempts to “engage ethnic and intercultural texts, particularly those texts outside the canon and derived from fieldwork research” (p. 2). Second, it opens a dialogue through a formal process of investigation that can possibly affect social change as knowledge and understanding of different social groups can assist in the creation of new public policies that consider the affect immigration has both on the receiving society as

well as on the migrant. Third, this kind of study stretches the boundaries of performance studies literature to not only include investigation of a non-traditional cultural group, but to also include a new way of looking at the concept of migration. Here, I define it as a cultural performance because it involves tradition as well as processes of identity struggle and resistance to cultural oppression. And with established methods of collecting, analyzing and performing personal narrative, that is, through ethnography, autoethnography and performance ethnography, researchers may access much more of this type of phenomena.

Ethnography attempts to understand more fully the conditions of oppression and commodification that operate in the culture, seeking to make these ways of the world more visible to others. The moral ethnographer searches for those *moments* when humans resist these structures of oppression and representation and attempt, in the process, to take control over their lives and the stories about them. (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 1053; italics mine)

It seems I have found one of those moments, through the reflections of Afro-Caribbean women on their experiences of migration. This moment is one that expresses a resistance to societal structures that attempt to define who we are and continue to oppress us because we are Black, woman, and foreign.

It is in this seventh moment as Lincoln and Denzin (2000) describe it, that we may find truth, as qualitative researchers continue to possess a “humanistic commitment... to study the world always from the perspective of the gendered, historically situated, interacting individual” (p. 1047). “The seventh moment

asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation, freedom, and community" (p. 1048).

Identity and Triple Jeopardy

Race and gender and ethnicity have proven to be distinguishing factors in the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women in comparison to the experiences of other immigrants to the U.S. The problem is one of triple jeopardy and invisibility as Afro-Caribbean women describe experiences that illustrate how being Black, female, and foreign creates a struggle with and for identity. Henke (2001) confirms this notion by noting:

While as Ralph Ellison pointed out in his novel *The Invisible Man* (1952), Black men in the United States have suffered from a certain invisibility and Black foreigners have suffered a double invisibility, West Indian women can be said to have suffered from a triple invisibility: as a Black, a foreigner, and a female. (Henke, 2001, p. 60; see also Marshall, 1987)

The women in this study face an American society that marginalizes them by refusing to recognize who they are and where they are from in some cases while in others, society uses their differences to continue to marginalize American Blacks. "The experience of seeing oneself represented as "the other" makes immigrants highly speculative and anxious to develop oppositional narratives that explain and connect their relationship to *otherness*" (Hedge, 1998, p. 42).

The identity struggle is thus, further complicated by the tendency of the women to distance themselves from African Americans, and yet they continue to identify themselves as part of an entire African diaspora, which includes African Americans as their relatives. Recognizing African Americans' historical struggles in the U.S. as well as believing that this struggle has affected African Americans' attitudes toward life in general has caused such distancing to take place. This distancing is also in response to the women's categorization by dominant modes of representation in general. But regardless of our differences or the ways in which we choose to present ourselves, our goals of survival, safety, and inclusion remain the same.

Survival, safety, and inclusion may just be what motivates us all as Black peoples to behave the way we do. But we must consider that these goals may be defined in different ways for many of us. Migration is part and parcel of a Caribbean cultural performance that occurs in an effort to survive. In it, we seek a safe place to learn and breathe and grow – to be free to utilize the resources and opportunities that ideally, should be available to all who seek them. Our inclusion in American society is complex and political. Our presence changes the social dynamics of the U.S. at the same time as it changes who we are or choose to be. Nothing seems to be certain in the search for identity. Nevertheless, we continue to be and transform ourselves everyday.

Personal Narratives and Implications for the Future

“Telling personal narratives *does something* in the social world; (They) participate in the ongoing rhythm of people’s lives as a reflection of their social organization and cultural values” (Langellier, 1989, p. 261).

Personal narratives gathered in the process of interviewing are bigger than themselves, they are “part of the constant narrative of the respondent’s life story, which sustains the continuities of the self and also accounts for and refashions discontinuities of the self through time” (Kelly & Dickinson, 1997, p. 275). Riessman (1990) agrees and extends this argument to say, “telling narratives is a major way that individuals make sense of disruptive events in their lives” (p. 1199) – those events in this case would be the cultural performances and acts of resistance inherent in the phenomenon of migration.

What I have found in the narratives of these women is that regardless of America’s social problems, they come in search of a better way of life and that’s all. It doesn’t necessarily change who they are in terms of their values and beliefs as some theorists would argue. Of course there is some Americanization that occurs, but not on the level that most assimilation theorists propose. Researchers have assumed in the past that voluntary migrants who romanticize about life in the U.S., are in essence more willing to adapt and adopt American cultural values – one of those values being, identification as Black or White and a passive acceptance of assimilationist’s goals of assigning immigrants a space in

American society. While this may have been true in some cases for many non-Black immigrants, this study indicates that African Caribbean women immigrants in particular, although illustrating acceptance of the ways of the American social system, are not willing to accept assimilationist's assignment of an American Black identity. Accepting American culture does not mean accepting the dominant group's definition of "Black," nor their assignment of a reference group orientation. The women locate themselves in spaces of cultural resistance in response to an attack on their self-concept. They find their own ways to cope with life in America and adapt to situations as they occur – never forgetting the reason why they came – and never taking anything for granted. And it's not wealth that they seem to be after; rather, it is freedom to make choices and move as you as you please that's most important. That freedom is a luxury where we come from, as both choices and resources are limited. And so we continue to search and grow and change with the tide. But our memories are fixed on home and we are forever destined to be betwixt and between – *le déraciné*. It is indeed a cultural performance of resistance and struggle, enmeshed in a social drama that frames the American cultural fabric.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Agreement

Dear Participant,

This research project proposes to assist in the pioneering stages of efforts to write about women's experiences, particularly Afro-Caribbean women's experiences, which have been a neglected area of research and history for some time. Its focus is on the experience of migration from an English-speaking country in the Caribbean to the United States. In addition this study will pose questions about your childhood development before migration as well as questions about your re-socialization or adaptation to a new environment in the United States. In inquiring about your background or childhood development, it may be appropriate, with your permission, that the researcher contact your relatives or friends living in your home country.

There is no compensation for your involvement, or the involvement of your relatives or friends. The researcher anticipates minimal discomfort to you as an informant, based on the personal nature of some questions. You may feel confident and reassured that whatever you reveal will be kept in the strictest confidence and will not be revealed if you highly disapprove.

With your permission the interviews, conversations and communications between you and the researcher as well as you and the other research participants will be recorded on audio cassette for use in the researcher's analysis. The tapes will be stored and secure in the researcher's home. These tapes will be transcribed at a later date from the date of the recording and these (transcripts), along with the researcher's notes from interviews will be kept and may be included in future research or performance events and in addition may be published. However, your name will not appear in these records or in the research transcripts. Pseudo-names will be used in place of your actual/given names. A few select individuals, which include members of UNI faculty and the project's advisor will be able to read reports of this study as well as the researcher's written analysis, but none of these individuals will have access to tapes, transcripts or field notes, with the exception of the personal narratives or quotations that result from the study.

Other procedures that will take place include scheduled visits by the researcher to observe your daily activities, both individually and possibly with the other research participants in your home environment, and/or work environment, and/or social environment. Your objection to the researcher's presence in any or all of these locations will be respected. Your participation in this project is purely voluntary and may cease at any time you see fit.

This is a qualitative research study and your participation stands to benefit the millions of other researchers, teachers, college students and other learners in the general population who can be affected in a positive way by your stories, and thus be able to better understand the impact of migration on the migrant herself. Thank you in advance for your willingness to share your life.

If you wish to inquire about this research project or want to know more about the rights of informants, you may contact either the office of the Human Subjects Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa, (319)273-2748 or the instructor overseeing this project, Dr. Phyllis Carlin, Communication Studies Department, University of Northern Iowa, (319) 273-2177. The researcher, Elvinet Wilson may be contacted via phone at (319)273-3795 (office) or (319)222-6049 (home) and is available for further questions regarding this study.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement.

Researcher's signature

Date

Informant's signature

Date

Printed name of informant